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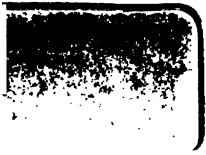
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# CONQUERED AT LAST:

FROM

“RECORDS OF DHU HALL AND  
ITS INMATES.”

A Nobel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



London :

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**Dedicated**

TO

THE HONOURABLE MRS. J. A. CAULFEILD,

BY

HARDRESS O'HARA.

DEAR MRS. CAULFEILD,

I have much gratification in dedicating this first essay in the *Novelist's Art* to you, as a mark of the truest esteem, and in memory of many happy hours passed at pleasant Drumcarne.

Yours, very truly,

THE AUTHOR.

*December 15th, 1873.*



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## CHAPTER I.

### REMINISCENCES.

OF my own personal history, fortunately for the patience of the reader, little need be said, and that little will be given in as few words as possible. My father—to begin with *my* beginning—one of the O'Hara's of —— (I have been told by those who knew him most intimately), was a highly honourable, straightforward, upright gentleman, a good soldier and leal friend. While still young he married the only daughter of Captain Henry Ireton of Castle-Ireton, or, more properly speaking, of General Ireton, of that ilk, as the Scotch say. For he, who had done good and true service during the rebellion of '98 and 1803, gained his rank in that long war which culminated so gloriously in Waterloo. The general died, leaving behind him three sons and a daughter. The eldest, Major Ireton, called Henry after both his noble grandfather and father, resided in his ancestral home. The second, Captain Frank, had married the heiress of Dhu Hall, a fine old mansion

two sons and a daughter, or rather, as the young lady took precedence on her entrée into the world, it is only just she should retain the honour, so we will say a daughter and two sons—Jessie, Philip, and Basil by name.

My father, Captain Hardress O'Hara, fell in a great battle some weeks before I made my début on the stage of life, and rather facilitated that important event, for the fatal intelligence being told too suddenly to my mother she became alarmingly ill, so that her life was despaired of. Her health, naturally delicate, never recovered from the sudden shock. She strove, for my sake, to bear up against the blow so fatal to her happiness, but in vain ; she lingered a few years, and then she died.

I well remember her large violet eyes, and have loved that colour ever since. They had a strange *far-off* expression, an appearance as if looking for something hidden away behind the silvery clouds and blue skies ; an expression that used to fill my childish breast with a feeling of quiet awe, which would have amounted to fear had it not been for the wonderful depth of tenderness and affection which was mingled with that far-off look when her regards were bent on me. A high, pale forehead, sweet mouth, a tall figure enshrouded in black robes, a hand marvellously white, are all I remember else. Yes ; one memory more is with me still, that

of being carried by my weeping nurse into a dimly-lighted room. There was a large bed with thick heavy curtains. Upon it lay my mother sleeping, white and cold, with an unnatural stillness round and about her which thrilled my heart with a nameless terror. I would have cried out, but my nurse, still weeping, hushed me and bade me not disturb her. I asked her why she cried, but was only answered by a more violent flood of tears.

Ah! there is one remembrance more. My nurse, bending over that sleeping form, so pale and still, bade me kiss, for the last time, my mother's lips. When mine met hers I shrank at first from the contact, they were so icy cold. Somehow or other that touch seemed to reveal the truth to me, for, springing out of my nurse's arms, I threw mine around my mother's neck beseeching her "not to leave me—not to leave me."

By my mother's written wish I was placed under my aunt's (Mrs. Ireton, of Dhu Hall) especial care, she, with her brother-in-law, Doctor Ireton, being appointed my guardians. On my arrival, Philip, my elder by some two years, paid me a good deal of attention, kept me chained to his side—an honour which rather bored me—patronized me to an infinite extent, compelled me to run his messages, perform a thousand little offices for him to spare *him* the trouble of attending on himself; played with me so long as it suited his lordly convenience or afforded him any amusement, then finally, all other resources being exhausted, began to bully me, a proceeding I stoutly resisted, and was soundly thrashed for my impertinence in daring to rebel. At last, whether



my admittance into the family as an unjustifiable infringement upon his rights.

That he should have regarded me in this latter light is strange, seeing that his uncle, Doctor Ireton, being childless, had adopted him, and although he was the heir of Dhu Hall it was not actually his home. My aunt perceived this unhappy disposition in her son and tried assiduously to check the evil and avert its consequences from me. Philip became more cautious in her presence, but I suffered in private in proportion to the self-restraint he was obliged to exercise when under her surveillance.

At length, unable to endure his tyranny any longer, and being too proud to complain of a wrong which I felt lay in my own power to redress, one day when he was more insolently tyrannical than usual I retaliated. Surprised at my presumption, and enraged at my insubordination, he struck me. "My soul in arms, and eager for the fray" I rushed at him, and received a blow which made a thousand many-coloured fires dance before my eyes. Again I blindly advanced, and a battle royal ensued, in which, if I did receive the facial ornamentation of two black eyes and an abnormal formation of nose, I had the intense satisfaction of punishing my adversary severely. In the heat of the warfare, taking advantage of some unguarded moment, he had contrived to wedge my head between his legs and was pum-

melling away at that part of my torn inexpressibles, which, from my peculiar position, was most exposed to his fury, when the Homeric contest was speedily ended by my fair cousin Jessie appearing on the field. Like a true woman she took part with the oppressed, and, true to her feminine instincts, she first directed her assault against the enemy's head, and strenuously endeavoured to seize him by the hair. Alas! in vain; it had been cut so short that very morning it afforded no satisfactory hold. Once more, faithful to the traditions of her sex (who are said to act ever in extremes), foiled in her attack upon his head, she bent all her energies in a raid upon his legs. Failing to extricate me she tripped him up. He seized her as he fell, and down we all rolled, head over heels into a horsepond, upon whose classic banks we heroes had contended. We emerged from its slimy depths with our courage considerably cooled.

My aunt heard of the affray (did not our dripping clothes bear testimony against us?) and condemned Philip to solitary confinement for two days, together with the stimulating diet of bread and water. I was recommended a mild course of Watts's hymns.

At this time my antagonist was spending his holidays at Dhu Hall, and the very day of our fight Dr. and Mrs. Ireton drove over from the town of O——, some twelve miles distant, to see their *protégé*. Great was their consternation and manifest their indignation when they beheld their adopted son, who might be heir of all the Iretons, blackened and bruised by one, no matter how nearly related, who did not bear the honoured name. Philip's version

aunt with such dark prophecies concerning me, such gloomy prognostications of evil, of the wretched career before me (which, if run, would obliterate the memory of George Barnwell and Jack Shepherd for ever), that she straightway determined, as soon as possible to send me to a boarding-school, to be relieved, for a time, of so weighty a responsibility. This old gentleman, amiable and kind-hearted in the main, though peculiar, died some few years since. Now, although in after-life we became very great friends, and he sipped his claret with me regularly on certain annual and festive occasions, I don't think he ever *quite* forgave me leading a life from which one might reasonably infer I would escape the hands of the hangman, die respectably in my bed, and rest in peace in the vault of my honoured forefathers.

Basil formed a complete contrast to his brother : whereas the latter was eminently handsome, with his clear olive complexion, lustrous violet eyes, Grecian nose, well-formed mouth, and thick curling hair, tall for his age and finely formed ; the former was very pale, with that worn expression which the perpetual presence of pain gave to the sufferer's face ; his eyes were of that dark blue-grey peculiar to the Iretons, his features finely chiselled, his hair pale gold, lustreless. He was small for his years and ungraceful. I had seen very little of him during my occa-

sional visits to Dhu Hall before I became a resident with the family, and that little had not prepossessed me in his favour.

On becoming an inmate, for the first few weeks he regarded me with shy, suspicious looks, and his manner was repelling. He wandered much by himself, and was fond of all sorts of out-of-the-way nooks and corners; shady retreats where violets grew, and tall ferns waved their graceful fronds; where brooklets, hurrying on from shade to sunshine, babbled their little secrets, and seemed as full of noisy importance as if their mission was to turn a mill-wheel. To such spots he would carry his books of childish lore, where he could enjoy them without fear of interruption; there he would dream away the long summer days, so we seldom met except at meal-times. One day he encountered me when I was suffering from the effects of his brother's tyranny before my signal rebellion. He hesitated, then shyly took my hand. He endeavoured by the tenderness of unspoken sympathy to win me from the recollection of the bitter wrongs which filled my eyes with indignant tears, tears that gathered, brimmed and burned, but were too proud to fall. At first I rejected his sympathy. Being Philip's brother, must he not take Philip's part? Having no brother, I magnified the nature of the ties which bound those so connected, little dreaming that disunion could ever come between hearts so united, little dreaming there is no strife so cruel as that waged between the members of a love-divided family. From that moment we appeared to change characters. He sought to win my friendship persistently, while I repelled

jealousy marred ; no ominous friend could smite with a whisper, no woman endanger with a smile ; so true it is there is " a love surpassing the love—"

The time arrived for my going to school. I felt very sorry parting with my aunt from whom I had received such kindness, and who was infinitely more tolerant of my misdemeanours than of those of her own children. Very sorry was I saying good-bye to Basil. More deeply did I feel than all this the bidding adieu to my fair cousin Jessie. I was madly in love with her, with all the devotion of a boy's unseeking, unselfish passion, a passion which first gently dawned on my heart with the cousinly kiss of welcome she bestowed upon me the day of my arrival at Dhu Hall, and which increased and increased until it blazed forth in full meridian splendour as we lay tumbling in the horse-pond, not a favourable position for the grand development of " the tender passion." True, she was some five or six years my senior, but what of that ? Who at the mature age of eight, when love first opens its enchanted vista to the enraptured vision, regards the mere discrepancies of age ? I was content to love for love's sweet sake. A look, a smile, a word, was all the return I sought for my devotion and pocket-money recklessly squandered in unlimited supplies of lollipops.

Ah, if the love of our later years were equally

unselfish! Part of my first holidays were passed, strange to say, with Dr. Ireton at O——. I imagine Basil and I were invited to amuse Philip, who had never been allowed to visit Dhu Hall since his ducking in the horse-pond. Nothing worthy of record occurred during the suddenly-ended visit, except that I thrashed Philip for grossly insulting his brother. Philip's external wounds were healed by an internal application of plum-cake and sherry, while Basil and his champion were despatched instantaneously, in a hired conveyance, to Dhu Hall in dire disgrace.

A few summers after the foregoing, Mrs. Ireton rented a cottage in the neighbourhood of an unimportant fishing-village, some two or three miles westward of the Giant's Causeway. Dr., Mrs. P. Ireton, and Master Hector O'Grady (of the O'Grady's of O'Grady's Town, a direct descendant of King O'Toole, his gander, and several other Irish potentates, and a distant connexion of the Lords of Castle-Ireton and Dhu Hall) were of the party.

Basil had brought his little dog with him—a beautiful animal, half Scotch terrier and half cocker, with long white curling hair, varied here and there with splashes of pale fawn.

Basil was strongly attached to "Breeze," and the affection between them was reciprocal. Breeze could never be tempted to leave his master. When sitting he was slumbering at his feet—when driving, lying on his knee—when walking, trotting by his side, with his silky tail arched over his back, his head bent to one side, glossy ears half cocked, and eyes thoughtfully regarding the ground with a side-

the destruction of two human lives, not to mention that of poor little Breeze into the bargain.

For some days after our arrival we (the juvenile members of the party) banded together with wonderful equanimity. Philip was gracious and condescendingly affectionate, Hector gallant and obliging, Basil almost demonstrative, and I generally amiable and forbearing.

Hector had just arrived from Dublin. Coming "hot" from the metropolis, arrayed in the latest glories of juvenile dandyism, he was a very extensive lion with us all for a time; but lions lose much of their *prestige* by familiarity—like comets, they ought only to shine at intervals.

He related marvellous stories of the sights he had seen, the places he had visited, the people he had met, the balls he had opened with full-grown countesses all ablaze with jewels, the conquests he had made, the hearts he had broken, all of which I for one most implicitly believed. He indulged in occasional cigars, which had the effect of making him horribly pale. However, as he declared he was in the seventh heaven of enjoyment, I concluded it must be so, and supposed the ghostly pallor merely some more refined expression of an unknown delight. In short, that surreptitious pleasures, although they might make vulgar little country boys like myself red and glowing, had the effect of

rendering your town exquisite white and sentimental.

He was about three years Philip's senior, and confessed his unbounded admiration for "the fair sex." I was much struck with the term, and wondered, in my simplicity, why he could not plainly say women or girls. Jessie and he became great colleagues in our amusements, and I murderously jealous. Oh! how I felt my vast inferiority in address, manners, conversational powers, and knowledge of the world. I had never danced with full-grown countesses, or broken feminine hearts! My very inexpressibles became an abomination in my sight; for did he not revel in all the glories of snow-white duck, while I wore only vulgar corduroy. What chance could I have against such a rival? All this was bad enough, but when he spoke of the marvels of a pantomime (he averred he had taken a part in its performance) I felt my suit was hopeless. What visions of fairy-land, of splendours unknown, of beauties, monsters, fiends, and stalworth knights floated before my excited imagination! Oh! how ardently I longed for some cruel giant to run away with Jessie; bear her off to his enchanted castle—what an opportunity to prove my devotion! Hector and I were to go in search of her; he was to make the first attempt at her rescue, and (of course) fail; was to be seized by the monster himself, and, after suffering unheard-of tortures, when he was just about being roasted for his captor's dinner, I was to rush valiantly to his aid, and, after superhuman efforts, slay the bloody tyrant, release Jessie, who, having duly unbound her hair, was to fall at my feet



if it pleased him, take them all, as the readiest mode of disposing of so many friendless females. I was to marry Jessie amid great rejoicings and a gorgeous display of red fire; for did not Hector say (and was not he an authority) that all pantomimes ended thus, and was not the programme of the romance I had laid out for myself to enact framed on his revelations? One thing caused me secret misgivings. Suppose the fire should become unruly? and then how very disagreeable to be compelled to enjoy our feast in the midst of flames on a hot summer's day after all our toil. But then might I not rescue her in winter? Yes; the giant should carry away Jessie in the coldest month of the year—in short, an especial month should be *got up* “expressly for the occasion.” Philip's hitherto disguised contempt for his brother and dislike to me began gradually to manifest itself in sundry ways, so at last we tacitly separated into two parties; not that I cared one iota for his foolish ill-temper, but I could not bear to leave Basil entirely alone.

Jessie, Hector, and Philip rambled for miles along the coast; while Basil (whose delicacy prevented his taking long walks) and I, accompanied by faithful Breeze, loitered nearer home, amusing ourselves upon the beach, scrambling among the cliffs, or launching tiny boats in the pools formed by the deep, clear hollows of the rocks, wearing out our

pockets with spars, shells, crabs, sea-urchins, seaweed, star-fish, and other damp abominations. Often we were wont to climb up a tall, isolated rock, around which the sea beat when the tide was coming in; we would take Breeze with us, and just as the water was closing us round, escape to the mainland, calling him to follow. The poor dog had a perfect horror of water and slippery rocks. He would fly about, jumping, uttering short, nervous barks, and wagging his tail in a most excited manner, as if the whole affair was a capital joke and he enjoyed it immensely, casting sidelong glances, the while, at the approaching waves, as if he doubted the amiability of their intentions. Basil never put him to the severe trial of wetting his feet; but when he thought his courage sufficiently tested would, at the risk of a thorough drenching, cross over for him, take him in his arms, and bear him tenderly to the green sward, pet and praise him as a reward rather for his apparent willingness to obey than for his obedience.

As a matter of course, all this time I was very jealous of Hector. I tried hard "to nurse my wrath and keep it warm;" but being but an indifferent nurse, I suppose, it cooled in spite of me. The fresh sea breezes, blowing so pure and free, the sparkling ocean, with its myriad of dancing waves, the wild sea-birds, dipping their white wings in the sunlight, and all the pleasant sights and sounds that haunt the ever-changing deep, these combined broke up my anger so effectually that, try as I might, I could never piece its scattered fragments again.

characterized our excursions, and which were but ill-suited to my adventurous disposition.

One day, as I stood gazing with wistful eyes after the three explorers as they were mounting the undulating sand-hills that lay on the right side of the river near which our cottage was situated, and making the sunny air ring with their merry laughter, Basil, who was standing at my side, looked up, and, catching my longing expression, interpreted it.

“I think, Hardress, old boy, I'd like to sit quietly to-day and read my new book—the fairy stories Uncle Ireton brought me. Just go, like a good fellow, after the rovers, and see whether their reports of the country be true.”

The temptation was strong. I bounded after my cousins. I had not gone many paces when a feeling of remorse came over me. It seemed so selfish to leave Basil, for I well knew his desire to be alone with his book was a mere fiction to deceive me into doing that which I so ardently desired. Stiffing my conscience, I soon overtook the party in advance. Very sarcastic was Philip on Nisus deserting Euryalus, Pylades forsaking his Orestes, Damon abandoning his Pythias. I felt angry, and was meditating the advisability of knocking him down, when Jessie delightedly took my arm, having first relinquished Hector's, so nothing *that* boy could say

had power to annoy me more. My bliss during our long walk would have been perfect, had not remorseful thoughts of Basil's loneliness obtruded themselves persistently on my happiest moments. We were absent several hours, so on our return home, finding Basil still absent, with many misgivings I went in search of him. I found him lying in the place I had left him, fast asleep. Faithful Breeze lay beside him, with his head on his master's chest. He uttered a low growl as I drew near, as if to reproach me for my desertion. The book lay open on the ground. I found by a paper marker he had only read four or five pages. I looked at him; his cheeks were wet with tears, and some drops hung on his long, dark, silken eyelashes. What caused them I never could tell—perhaps some painful thoughts having reference to his constitutional delicacy, which hindered his joining in the sports, pastimes, or robust pleasures of his equals in age.

I gently awoke him. He was delighted to see me, and surprised to find the sun dying in the west.

He asked how I had enjoyed myself. I gave him a satisfactory reply, and inquired how *he* had enjoyed *himself*. He said, "Very much." "Ah, my friend," thought I, "your ideas of enjoyment are limited as the old Scotch woman's conceptions of heaven—*yours*, sleeping on a bare rock in a bright summer day; *hers*, "sitting on a bare cloud singing hallelujah."

No plan he, in his unselfishness, ever formed for my pleasure afterwards could induce me a second time to leave him during our long sojourn at the seaside.

assist him), and thinking the dog would follow him, being now far from the cottage, he set him down. Away the liberated animal scampered—away flew Philip after him. Unable to overtake him, he hurled a stone and struck the poor brute savagely on the side. It fell, howling piteously. Its persecutor bounded forward ; but, just as he was about to seize it, up sprang the dog and sped away, limping, but far outstripping its pursuer. Half an hour afterwards he was sleeping on Basil's breast.

## CHAPTER II.

### A SEASIDE ADVENTURE.

ONE afternoon, I remember it well, the weather was wild and stormy. The sea, ever fretful on this coast even on the bluest day, was raging fiercely; its waves foaming and dashing against the rocks as if to revenge on *them* the torture *they* were enduring from the savage attacks of the cruel north wind. How wild and grand, how omnipotent in their tumultuous might those billows appeared as they came thundering on, veiling their proud heads ere they dashed themselves to pieces in their mad despair.

We, that is Basil, myself, and Breeze, were out among the black crags, half enveloped in the thick spray which floated round us like a Scotch mist. Presently, there came a rushing wind which scattered the dense haze, and out came the sun right royally. How glorious the ocean looked! its might, its majesty, its power thrilled us with thoughts and feelings for which we knew no utterance. The wind sank almost as suddenly as it had arisen. Philip and Hector came to us. They were going to Dunluce, and the former wanted to take Breeze

had not then heard of the blow it had received on the former occasion of its being forced away from him.

Angry to see the animal crouching tremblingly in his presence, Philip seized hold of it, and struck it savagely on the head. I saw the blood mount up to Basil's brow as he stood regarding his brother with quivering nostrils and compressed lips. I remonstrated with Philip, who, in defiance, struck the dog again. Sternly I ordered him to let the dog alone, and took hold of it to wrest it from his grasp. The poor shrinking creature had like to be torn asunder between us. Basil said, with forced calmness, "Let him take it, Hardress, if he will promise not to ill-use it further."

Unwillingly I relinquished my hold. As much to enrage its champions as injure his victim, holding it by its hind legs he struck it against a rock. The tortured animal twisting suddenly round, bit him savagely on the hand. Philip, uttering a sharp cry of pain, flung it from him, and poor Breeze, like Tilburina's woes, was "committed to the winds and waves." Basil rushed to the very edge of the slippery rocks. Had the day been calm it would have been impossible without a boat to have saved the dog, as the ever-breaking waves spent themselves against the steep, perpendicular rocks several feet below the height from which it was cast. But

now the sea lifted by the winds dashed over them furiously, and we only avoided danger by climbing up higher boulders. A huge wave had recoiled, leaving a chasm below as Basil darted forward. Breeze reappeared on the hollow surface, borne helplessly along, unable even to struggle amid the sweltering foam. A vast wave rising brought him onward almost to Basil's very feet. I saw his danger, and ere the cry of terror escaped my lips, he had stretched forth his hands to save his favourite, and losing his balance fell headlong into the seething flood. I saw him thrown forward, then whirled back into the abysmal deep. One bound, and I gained the fatal spot where he had last stood. The recoiling waters had left the steep sides of the cliff bare a full fathom. I looked, but nowhere saw my friend. Presently he emerged holding fast the dog. I knew he could not swim, and even if he could, what avail was any human strength or skill to do battle for life with such a tumultuous sea. He is borne towards me. Oh, heaven! he will be dashed, beaten to death against the cruel rocks, and in my very sight! Absorbed by this great fear, reckless of consequences, I untied my neckerchief, threw off my coat, and desperately plunged in; the next moment I was fighting obstinately with the wrathful deep for two human lives. I had managed, I knew not how, to lay hold of Basil—down we went together beneath the overwhelming flood. Oh! how the waters rushed and hurtled and huzzed about my sinking head! It appeared as if we never would rise again. It was my first terrible experience of an age compressed into moments; an experience



strange sensation of wonderment at the absence of all fear, and dreamily speculating whether our death would be a painful one, and wondering what they would think about it all at the cottage. We were near the savage crags. It flashed upon me, there might be safety for us if we could only reach them, although I knew to be thrown upon them or dashed against them was inevitable destruction. I held Basil with a tenacious grasp, which even the intense desire of life the sight of the rocks inspired me with, could not make me loosen. He either lacked the power, or had sufficient sense in his extremity not to lay hold of me; had he grappled with me we must both have inevitably perished; but still, he retained his firm grasp of poor Breeze, who had so jeopardized both our lives. A wave lifted us upward, forward on its foamy crest to the very face of the rock. A moment would decide our fate. Desperately I flung my arm round a small pointed snag, and seized it with my disengaged hand. Desperately I held, on endeavouring to seize the slimy sea-weed between my teeth, as the spent wave tried to drag us back to a horrible death. My arm caught in a fissure between the rocks, otherwise I could not have withstood the backward force of the water. I felt afraid to move, lest I should lose my hold. I felt the double weight of Basil and Breeze grow heavier and heavier. My hand was cut and bleeding,

my arm strained and lacerated was gradually being dragged through the cleft by the burden it sustained. I felt Basil slipping from my benumbed fingers. Oh! the agony of the moment! to be so near salvation yet to be so lost! Again the water threw us upward, wrenched my arm from the groove, then cast us bruised and maimed upon the wave-worn rocks. For a time I remembered nothing else.

It would appear that Hector, seeing the catastrophe, half wild with terror and indignation, had first seized the horror-stricken Philip by the jacket and inexpressibles and sent him flying into a pool of water broad and deep, but defended from the violence of the main ocean by intervening barriers, and then fled calling for help. When I regained my consciousness I found I still retained Basil in my grasp, he was close by my side, half immersed in water and insensible. The rescued animal was lying on his breast, bruised and maimed, licking his pallid face. As I looked upon that face so white and death-like, I thought of another pale face (so different in its pallor from this) which I had once seen and loved—how long ago it seemed!—sleeping as calm, as still, as passionless. I tried to speak, but utterance failed me; to move, but I could scarcely stir. The dog perceived the almost imperceptible motion of my hand and bent on me his large beseeching eyes, imploring aid for his beloved master, rather than for his suffering self. Then came kind-hearted men bounding down the cliffs with coils of rope in their hands, and led by Hector with Jessie flying breathless by his side. I saw them bind a rope

seen behind and upon a boulder near which he stood he would have been whirled to his death. When the water retreated, he left his perilous position and rejoined his anxious comrades. I saw them whisper and shake their heads as they turned away from Jessie, who stood with clasped hands gazing imploringly upon them.

We had been cast between two jutting crags a few yards behind the place where they were standing. I tried to attract their attention, but in vain. So certain were they of our fate, they were about to leave, deeming all further search useless.

The agony of that moment was greater than any torture I had yet endured. The apathy which pervaded my every sense on my first recovering from the violence of the shock had left me, and the fierce desire of life took possession of me. And yet to lie there incapable of speech or motion! my limbs were stiffening, my body ice; to be left there to die miserably, no help, no succour for him I loved so well! With a despairing effort, I raised myself slightly, and uttering a faint cry sank down exhausted.

The men paused and listened, they evidently thought it but the call of some distant sea-bird, and slowly pursued their way. Breeze, as if aware of my intentions, still lying on Basil's heart, set up a feeble wail. Again the men paused and listened;

again the piteous plaint rose more distinctly on the air. Jessie sprang forward, crying excitedly, "It's Breeze! it's Breeze!" I knew we were saved, yes, *we*, for I could not, would not think Basil otherwise than fainting or stunned.

They came and discovered us where we were so helplessly lying. I saw tears trembling in eyes, which, perhaps, had never wept at their own sorrows. They thought Basil was dead. One man, the rope was still coiled round his waist (removing the dog very gently), lifted him up tenderly in his rough arms, and pressing him as if for heat to his bared breast, bore him homeward. Some of the others raised me; and supporting me, we followed in sad procession. I motioned to poor Breeze, who gazed wistfully after us unable to follow. Hector understood my meaning; lifting him carefully, he carried him after us, utterly disregarding the damage his fine clothes would sustain from the contact; an act of self-denial which merits mention especial and honourable.

Jessie walked by the side of the man who carried Basil, holding her brother's damp, cold hand, and weeping silently.

As we surmounted a huge tor, I marked Philip cowering behind it, bare-headed and dripping, shivering and white with terror.

Dr. Ireton, who had been engaged for years on a treatise on Irish antiquities, had taken his wife and his hostess to Dunluce Castle, to examine the ruins, so they knew nothing of the accident till its first danger was over.

The hurry and alarm being past, Mrs. Ireton spoke

judicious remonstrances, might have had a beneficial effect on all his after-life, had not his guardian's ill-advised interposition tended to render all expostulation of none effect. He thought the miserable condition Philip was in, which he attributed to some unacknowledged piece of bravery on his part (Hector could not, and Philip would not tell it was the result of his improvised plunge-bath), the agony of mind he had suffered, together with the maternal lecture, more than compensated for the accident he had unwittingly caused. "After all," said the Doctor, "the lad's cruelty was not so great. Had he not as good a right to the dog as his brother, in fact, being the son and heir had he not a better? Would not any high-spirited lad have equally determined to conquer the brute's stupid obstinacy? Who ever condemned a boy, or a man either for that matter, of cruelty for attempting to subdue an unruly horse? If we did not master mindless animals, they would eventually turn and master us. For his part, instead of blaming the boy for attempting to drown the savage brute, he considered he was perfectly justified in so doing. The dog had bitten him, and the world knew how dangerous it was to let such an animal live; indeed, had he a voice in the matter, he would vote for the dog being shot at once, even if he were as valuable as O'Neill's storied hound."

My aunt could not be induced to take this philosophical view of the case, or to regard Philip's conduct as anything but vile, consequently a high quarrel ensued. Mrs. Philip, (or Mrs. Doctor Ireton, as she was sometimes called), when appealed to, agreed with each speaker alternately. At length she became so mildly bewildered with the contending merits of the case, she was fain to look helplessly at each orator in turn as he or she took up the argument, and lay down her knitting, with her an infallible sign of her reasoning powers being *hors de combat*, and if a moral perception of the truth, glimmering faintly on her gentle intellect, led her to coincide with my aunt, with "Very true indeed, ma'am," an indignant "Mrs. Philip, I'm astonished at you," from her husband sent her once more hopelessly adrift. Then her wonderful faith in her husband's infallibility came to her aid, and resuming her knitting, Mrs. Philip Ireton was herself again. Philip now began to think his conduct was not so reprehensible after all, and soon to look upon himself as a sort of martyr, and finally to pout and swell under his imagined grievances. The Doctor, in high dudgeon, drove off that very evening, bearing with him his wife and adopted son. When next we heard of the latter he was delirious, having been stricken down with fever, induced by Hector's bath. I, being strong and vigorous, recovered speedily from the shock my system received; not so Basil. It was so long before he could leave his bed, serious fears were entertained he had sustained some grave internal injury; and although I now think those fears were groundless, I am sure his constitution

even when he sank into an unquiet sleep. Poor Breeze was sadly bruised. However, he appeared to rally after a few days, and then he began to droop; gradually he became worse and worse, until we gave up all hope of saving his life, now doubly dear to us. Day and night he lay by the side of his master's bed, and rarely could be induced to leave his position. If Basil was longer quiet than usual, he would paw at the curtains or coverlet anxiously, uttering a subdued, plaintive whine; but soon, as he heard his master's voice, or felt his wasted fingers gently stroking his head, he would lie down again contented and happy. At length he grew too feeble even for this exertion. So long and wistfully would he look upward, striving to catch one glance from the face he loved with all a dog's marvellous fidelity. We made a bed for him, and placed it on a table close by Basil's side. He lay there with his large dark eyes, so full of love and pity, fixed on his suffering master, who often fell asleep with one arm tenderly thrown around the watcher's neck. Then Breeze was happy. At last his breath came shorter and shorter—he drank a little, but refused to eat. One day he appeared stronger than he had been for weeks; he was particularly restless, strove hard to leave his basket and drag himself to his master. At Basil's request, I lifted him up and placed him at his side. He crept

fondly into his bosom, and lay there bending a long loving gaze upon his face, while the full tears fell slowly from his dark eyes. With difficulty he strove to lick the hand that caressed him: then his breathing grew fainter and more laboured, so I took him in my arms, and replaced him in his own bed. He gave a faint struggle as I laid him down, then, with his clouded eyes bending their last fond look on the face of him he served so faithfully, he expired. I thought I saw a tear on Basil's cheek. I may have been mistaken, for my own eyes were dim.

In a short time Basil was able to leave his room and lie on the sofa in the parlour. Then, as he grew stronger, I used to carry him out, and seat him on the short sward, in the bright sunshine; then, as his vigour increased, he could walk a little; then, by degrees, we ventured further and further out among the rocks, among which erstwhile we had both so loved to wander. Instinctively I avoided the scene of our former danger. Nor did he ever allude to it in words; but a glance of the eye, a motion of the lip, or a warm pressure of the hand, revealed the depth of his gratitude for being preserved from so terrible a death. From the hour of his rescue I looked upon him as something belonging peculiarly to myself, something born to me at the cost of fear, suffering, and great danger—that fateful trinity.

Sometimes the daughter of the people whose house we occupied, in her thoughtful kindness, would come and sit beside us, when her daily avocations were over, accompanied by Jessie. We



but a sublimed reality.

How our hearts thrilled at the woes of "Amanda Fitz-Allan," or the dangers "Malvina" was so perpetually falling into, so that we feared to congratulate ourselves, or rejoice with her at one escape, knowing so well she was only rushing headlong to meet some direr misfortune. Then the "Castle of Otranto," with its helmet and sable plumes, and the wicked uncle who loved his niece. How happy was I Uncle Ireton never fell in love with Jessie, though I rather wondered he did not. There were other books equally interesting. The stories ended, we never rested till we purchased the precious volumes themselves. When obtained, how eagerly we devoured their contents.

What a world was revealed to our ardent gaze—so full of stirring adventure, exciting incidents, of noble thoughts translated into noble actions—a world in which truth, manhood, and virtue were sure to triumph over all obstacles, and be crowned with victory. Alas! for the dreams of youth!

No later than yesterday (I'm an old man now), pondering on the pleasant days gone by, and wishing to recall some of the fresh feelings of my youth, I took from my library-shelf a volume, richly bound in white and gold, called "The

Children of the Abbey." I read a page, perhaps two or three, then closing the book reverently, restored it to its niche. Why destroy a grateful memory?

Sweeter the dream of the poet, which transforms the rainbow into a pathway for the angels, than the philosophy of the sage, that sees in it nothing but rainfall, sunshine, and opposing cloud.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some two years after, my first love, Jessie, was married to Captain Ireton, the eldest son of General Ireton, of Castle-Ireton, county —.

My despair was great when the smiling traitress first disclosed to me the fact of her engagement, looking most heartlessly happy the while. But I smothered my feelings, like the young lady in the ballad. The excitement of the wedding tended to mitigate the anguish I recklessly strove to drown, Clarence-like, in floods of Burgundy, assisted by champagne and sparkling Moselle.

"The grief that cannot speak  
Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break."

I essayed a speech in vain. My feelings overcoming me I burst into a flood of tears. I was carried off ignominiously and put to bed. Oh! with what a racking headache and parched mouth I awoke next morning. I knew it was despair, though they told me it was wine.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE DARK LADY'S GRAVE.

A FEW more years have passed, and I am staying once more at Dhu Hall. Commissioned by my aunt I am bearing a message to her daughter, Mrs. Henry Ireton (the Jessie of my earliest love), of Castle-Ireton, county —. The morning is bright and cheery, and although the distance between Dhu Hall and Castle-Ireton is some twelve miles, my horse is fresh, and in thorough condition, so I resolve to make a *détour*, and revisit a spot which had always a strange fascination for me, not only on account of the remarkable beauty of the view it commanded, but also for its connexion with a tragic history. A married woman of position had, in a fit of jealousy, hanged herself in her wedding veil—so said the coroner and the jury, though public rumour darkly hinted at even a deadlier crime—and, in obedience to an old and savage custom, enforced by law, and now, for the honour of our common humanity happily abrogated, the remains of the miserable wife were interred on the public road; and so the buried corse of Ruth Maxwell (the dark lady) was left to moulder in its unconsecrated sepulchre till doomsday.

Always remembering her grave was below a broad grass-plot on the common highway, a more lovely or romantic spot could hardly have been selected in the whole county. Even now, though I have not seen it for many years, full well do I remember the locality. It was a favourite ride of mine in the sunny long ago; and at this moment its green beauty is verdant in my memory; distinct before my eyes as on the last spring morning I reined my horse in the midst of its natural loveliness. Ah! we have no such golden mornings, such blue noontides, such crimson sunsets, such purple midnights, such sporting, hunting, shooting, fishing, dancing, flirting; no such (forgive me, beauty) pretty girls, true-hearted friends, blithe companions *now*, as "in the merry days when we were young."

"The dark lady's grave" (it bears its name still) was situated in the very centre where two roads intersected each other. The line of way by which you left the thriving town of M—— to reach it ran westward, over graceful and undulating hills, each towering above its wooded or gorse-crowned fellow, till, winding between the peaks of the mountains some miles distant, it was gradually lost in the silvery haze. To the south the face of the country was broken up into a hundred fantastic varieties of form, by hill and valley, richly cultivated fields, and barren wastes; and the grim ruins of Maxwell Lodge frowning darkly in the foreground. Away to the north stretched a broad champaign, dotted with cottages, clumps of fir and alder, and bounded by the far-off mountains, (a continuation of the chain which extended westward,) their distant summits

all the country took captive the gazer's eye.

Having reached the grave (turning my horse's head, in order that I might quietly enjoy the beautiful prospect), I allowed the bridle to fall heedlessly on his glossy neck, an act of imprudence which nearly cost me my life, yet one from which the greatest blessing that ever sanctified my life arose.

At my feet lay M——, with its stone houses, white cottages, and beautiful church—its gardens rich with bloom, and graceful trees—all looking so peaceful, so tranquil in the early day, one would have thought that sorrow, toil, care, all the petty distractions, heartburnings, jealousies, all the strivings, bickerings, which make up the aggregate of common life in a country town, were altogether unknown in the thrice-happy M——. Beyond, and on either side the village, lay stretches of meadowland and fallow hills, where gentlemen had built their seats and planted their domains. About four miles to the east of M—— gleamed in the glad sunshine the rippling waters of Lake ——, its distant shores fringed with trees and brushwood down to its very edge, its nearer strand partially hidden by the intervening uplands, and its clear mirror reflecting the blue splendours of the o'er-arching heavens.

Mountains again bounding the scene, and forming with those extending on the north and west, an amphitheatre, in which lake and valley, undulating hill and gleaming river, and the little town lay peacefully. Close on my right, descending abruptly from the road, was a deep ravine, through the midst of which a tiny streamlet, sparkling amid grasses, cresses, and stones, rippled unceasingly. The dingle itself was studded with trees, but not too thickly; not so as to hinder with their shade the wild flowers decking its emerald slopes in sweet profusion, and creating an effect more beautiful by far than ever realized by royal gardener, with his unnatural geometric inelegancies. The east was flooded with the light of "the uprisen sun," the lake shone like a huge nugget in the morning's blaze, the distant peaks of the opposing mountains had caught the crimson glory, and were flashing it back in ruby arrows through the freshful air, while their waists and base were enveloped in pearly mists, or robed in dark purple and sombre olive. In the little dell the wood anemone, primroses, and violets were starring the grass with white, pale daffodil, and faint azure, and hyacinths, "like heaven upbreking through the earth," were carpeting the sward with their purple blossoms.

On a budding wild rose a robin chaunted forth his song of joy, and love, and hope. Joy that the cold wintry days were past, and the time of singing birds was come; love to his bright-eyed partner, who was busy peering among the uncurling ferns and green mosses at her feet (thrifty little housewife as she was, with an eye to present wants and future

sign. On looking round, I perceived a weird figure, where tradition said the suicide's grave had been dug. It was that of an old and miserable-looking woman, who stood shivering with drooping head, and arms folded cross-wise on her breast, in an attitude of deep despondency. Her grey hair, thin and uncovered, fell loosely over her shoulders, across which was thrown a mere rag of an old red cloak. A thin calico dress (out of which all its original colour had been bleached, rather than washed, long ago) extended a little way below her knees, so worn and thin as scarcely to afford any protection to the poor shrinking body; stockings full of holes, from which all but the legs had been worn away, completed her scanty costume. Her arms and feet were bare, blotched by constant exposure to the "winter's frost and summer's sun," and scarred and bruised by travel. There was something so mysterious in her sudden appearance by that unhallowed grave, something so wild in her manner and look, as she stood there, that curiosity compelled rather than induced me to address her.

"You appear interested in that grave: did you ever hear of the sad fate of her who sleeps there? the sad fate of poor Ruth Maxwell?"

She started from her drooping position. With head thrown back, and upraised arms, she gazed on me, the light of madness gleaming in her sunken eyes.

“Who speaks that forbidden name to me?” she cried. “I have met my doom—Orestes-like, the furies pursue me! my doom, go forth to meet your fate.” Then with a shriek so full of despair—

Her shrill cry terrified my horse. With an abrupt plunge he sprang forward, and dashed headlong down the hill in his ungovernable fear. The reins I had so unwisely relinquished were over his head and down among his legs, before I even had time to strive and repossess them. Withdrawing my feet from the stirrups, to be prepared for the worst that might befall me, I pressed my knees firmly against the saddle. All attempts to seize the bridle, or calm his terror by words or actions, were worse than fruitless; they only seemed to urge him on his impetuous flight, as feeling himself freed from all restraint, with outstretched neck, distended nostril, and the hot foam-flakes flying from his mouth, he dashed onward, his speed increasing at every stretch. As I heard the stones struck by his swift hoofs showering behind me, I marvelled he was not thrown in his reckless descent. We flew past horsemen, whose sole effort seemed to be to keep out of our way, past heavily laden carts, so closely my leg touched their wheels, their drivers vainly gesticulating, striving to check our dangerous career. We near the town; there are hopes of safety now. Scarcely had the thought flashed across my brain, when a large dog sprang out of a cottage with a savage bark, adding new terrors to the almost maddened animal, and causing him to swerve aside and scour along another road, leaving M—— behind us. I have a dim, confused recollection of passing people



weird, fantastical dance; of a clattering-carriage approaching, of my horse stumbling, regaining his hoof-hold, staggering; of my flinging myself out of the saddle, of a fall, a crash,—and nothing more.

As consciousness returned, I was aware of being borne onward with a gentle motion accompanied with a dull pain. I heard subdued whisperings—the voices were strange to me. I felt a touch upon my hand. I lay passive, with a sort of indistinct intuition of some accident having happened; of vague wonder at what caused the motion, of what the whispering referred to, to whom the voices belonged. Then the pain became more and more acute, and increased with each movement. Suddenly a sharp pang darting through my left arm, caused me to wince; I tried to move it, it was powerless. The hand which held mine was quickly withdrawn, and softly too, as fearing to disturb me. On opening my eyes, I found I was in a travelling-carriage, which was slowly moving along at a funeral pace. I heard a gentle voice say in a low tone, “Mamma, I think he is becoming conscious. Oh! what can we do for him?”

“I trust so, my love,” a kind voice replied. “We must take him to M——, and procure medical assistance at once. I fear he has sustained some serious injury. I am sure his arm is broken.”

I knew now what caused the acute pain, and why my arm was powerless.

"Was it not a mercy we were on the road," said the first speaker. "I thought I should have died when I saw the horse fall on him."

"He might have been killed."

"The coachman says the poor animal broke its neck," said the younger of the two, in a voice so sweet and pitiful, that despite the agony I was beginning to suffer, in spite of the sorrow I felt on hearing of the sad fate of my horse, it soothed me with its plaintive melody. The speaker's face was partially turned towards me. I could see she was very young and very fair. She held her bonnet in her hand, and her freed hair fell in thick, pale, golden clusters round her shoulders. As I gazed on her gentle loveliness, thinking I never before had seen a face so beautiful, she bent on me her violet eyes, in whose lucid depths pity and interest were blended.

A lady, a matured resemblance of her companion, sat at my left side, supporting my head,—a gentle and gracious-looking woman, of about forty years of age. They were both clad in deep mourning, and I remarked the elder of the two wore a widow's cap.

It was thus I became acquainted with Violet and her amiable mother, Lady Augusta Trevor.

They took me to the Royal Hotel, M——, where I was well known, and under Lady Augusta's supervision I was lifted out of the carriage, and placed on a bed. The doctor was sent for, and a messenger despatched to Dhu Hall. The former having arrived, found my injuries to be of so serious a nature that he considered it advisable for me to remain where I was

my vigorous constitution and strong vitality, soon reasserted themselves, and knitted together broken bones, and put bandages and lotions to flight.

And so another year ran on.

## CHAPTER IV.

LUCY GRAHAM.

DR. IRETON had now been residing in Dublin some four years or thereabouts, when the first act of a tragic drama was enacted beneath his hospitable roof.

He had removed there from O——, in order to be with Philip while he was pursuing, with much success, his studies in Trinity College. His ambition had been to enter the army, but this desire his uncle strenuously opposed, although he never advanced any reason for so doing. His enemies maliciously whispered that, as he was anxious for his adopted son to make a wealthy and noble match, he feared to let him encounter the perils young officers, especially if heirs, ran from charmingly innocent girls and their designing mothers. For had not the Doctor himself fallen a victim to a matrimonial onslaught before he was a year appointed as surgeon to the —— Regiment. It happened in this wise. The company to which he was attached was quartered in one of the pleasantest towns in the south-west of Ireland, and there he met with Miss Sibby, the sixth daughter of Sir Phelim and Lady O'Shaughnessy, who was great-

never getting out of it. The gallant young doctor was wont to escort Miss Sibby home from church, for Lady O'Shaughnessy and her six unmarried daughters were very regular in their attendance on Divine service, particularly when the most eligible officers quartered in their vicinity were free to form matrimonial incumbrances. They met one night at a county ball, and Miss Sibby—arrayed in the oft-repeated glories of pink tarletan, adorned with blue ribbons and forget-me-nots, long white (by courtesy) kid gloves, and a gorgeous wreath of impossible yellow roses on "her brow"—danced away the Doctor's discretion or his heart (it's much the same thing) in the jig Polthogue. Miss Sibby was good-tempered and impressionable—Miss Sibby "was young and simple," attractive from the beauty of youth, a fresh complexion and pleasant smile, rather than regularity of feature. She was short in stature and more than inclined to *embonpoint*. Her head was placed in such proximity to her plump, white shoulders, it would seem as if Dame Nature, at first, had quite overlooked that necessary adornment, then, hastening to repair the mistake, had formed as much of one as she possibly could in a very limited space of time. What Miss Sibby did she did with her whole heart; consequently she adored the handsome young Doctor, and danced with infinitely more agility than grace. In fact, dancing the Irish jig was her

one grand crowning accomplishment, and as it obtained for her that good which is the great end of all young ladies' elegant acquirements, I can't see why she should have troubled herself particularly about any other proficiency. After supper, inspired by the valorous promptings of whisky-punch and the jig Polthogue, the gallant Doctor breathed some tender words into his enchanted partner's ear which sounded *very like* a proposal, more like than anything she had ever heard before. Miss Sibby, as I have remarked already, "being young and simple," she gently squeezed his hand in token of delicate assent, then simpered, blushed, and faltered "ask mamma," in concession to propriety and in conformity to the young ladies' acknowledged routine—not, perhaps, the usual routine, after all; as it has been told me it is customary for young ladies placed in such agitating circumstances to refer faintly to "papa." But Miss Sibby knew better. Her father, a rollicking, jovial, hard-drinking, careless, pleasant fellow from home, was a very different person when, metaphorically speaking, resting in the bosom of Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. Even his drinking ardour, if not abated, was restrained, except when he could secretly indulge it in the harness-room, with his groom or coachman. However, the Doctor was not under the necessity of appealing to "mamma," for, watchful as the Dragon of the Hesperides, Lady O'Shaughnessy had mounted guard over her daughter. Scarcely had the compromising words escaped the treacherous "barriers of sound," when a voice beside him, trembling with emotion, whispered, "Bless you, me darlins; may you be happy!" and the gallant Doctor, almost con-

in her old lumbering carriage, much, says scandal, to his own discomfiture, and in despite of his brother officers. In a few days he was married by special licence. Again, to quote scandal, he was perfectly unconscious of his happiness till the morning after its consummation, when, waking, he found the fair Miss Sibby—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Philip Ireton—calmly slumbering, in unconscious innocence, at his side.

Two remarkable effects his unforeseen bliss had upon him—he abjured whisky-punch from that time forth for evermore, and evinced a strong repugnance to the army, from which he immediately retired. Being generous, not even during the gentle breezes that sometimes ruffle the smoothness of matrimonial life did he ever allude to his hasty marriage, and his wife adored him with all the devotion of which her facile nature was capable.

Doctor Philip Ireton was a large, handsome man; but, from a long habit of writing and study, had acquired a stoop, which apparently detracted from his height and, formerly, fine soldier-like bearing. He had been engaged for upwards of fourteen or fifteen years on a stupendous dissertation on Irish Antiquities—had so arranged and re-arranged, so added to and pruned his subject-matter, so advanced and abandoned theories, that the volume which was to astonish the world and immortalize the writer's

name seemed as far off being finished as ever. Had it ever been produced, it certainly would have astonished the world, but the immortality his name would have gained might have been not such as he had anticipated, and far from enviable.

Mrs. Philip was a remarkable woman—a very remarkable woman. She had three ideas; the first—a rare opinion for a wife to hold—that her husband was the handsomest, cleverest, noblest, wisest, and best man in the world; and that no possible combination of circumstances could ever produce another like him.

The second, her utter belief in his infallibility; although she would have accounted it high blasphemy to have ascribed such an attribute to his Holiness the Pope. In fact, the plump little dame had so merged her identity in that of her lord and master, her mind had gradually become nothing more than a pale reflex of his own.

Her last grand idea was, the O'Shaughnessys of Castle Ruinous, county ——, were the most ancient, noble, and illustrious family in existence, the Iretons, of course, excepted. Although no Colenso had then arisen to instil doubts in believing minds, her faith in the completeness and accuracy of the Mosaic record would have been vastly strengthened had the name of O'Shaughnessy appeared in its genealogical chronicles.

She had an especial affection for the Book of Daniel, particularly those chapters relating to the three children. She fancied she traced an affinity between the names of O'Shaughnessy and Shadrach; a wonderful resemblance, considering the barbarous era



quities, but he had regarded her over his spectacles with a look of such ineffable surprise, the little woman was rendered speechless, and was never known afterwards to venture an original opinion, her first being such a signal failure. By-the-bye, I have done injustice to the fair Sibby; she had not only three ideas, but four. Her last idea was, the whole duty of a married woman lay in admiring obedience to the will of her husband—and knitting.

\* \* \* \* \*

In a handsomely furnished library in Merrion Square, Dublin, sat Doctor Ireton immersed in his antiquities. Mrs. P. Ireton was by his side, like Maggie, knitting in silence, for when her husband was engaged in writing he would admit of no conversation. I, seated in the window, was idly looking at the passers-by as they hurried past on a late autumnal evening. The candles were lighted, though, out of courtesy to me, *one* blind had been only let fall and the curtains partially drawn.

“May I come in?” said a voice softly, as the door was half opened, and a beautiful face appeared beside it.

“Hush! Of course, my dear,” said my aunt in a whisper, pointing significantly to her husband.

A young girl entered the room noiselessly, and seating herself on a low stool leaned gracefully against a sofa which was placed near the fire. Taking a pencil and tearing a leaf out of her pocket-book,

she wrote, "I have arranged Mr. Philip's wardrobe and left everything in readiness." She handed it to Mrs. P. Ireton, who signified her approbation by a great many nods and smiles.

The young girl received these acknowledgments with her sweetest bow, but when Mrs. P. Ireton's regards were again diverted a look of bitter disappointment clouded her fair face. She did not seem to notice my presence as I sat half concealed behind the rich damask curtains. She remained gazing gloomily at the fire, as if she would fain read some revelation of her destiny in its glowing caverns.

Lucy Graham had lost her mother some years, and her father had fallen by the side of mine on a foreign shore. Her mother was the favourite sister of Mrs. P. Ireton, but after her death she had resided with her grandmother who was at that time a widow. Lady O'Shaughnessy having no husband to control, no daughters to scheme for, and finding her grandsons impracticable and her grand-daughters bent on hunting down their own prey without her aid or intervention; finding she had nothing to live for in this world, wisely resolved to leave it for a better. Once more homeless, Lucy went to reside with one of her aunts, but she being poor and beautiful, and her cousins rich and plain; she being highly accomplished and ambitious, and her cousins having all her ambition without the accomplishments, the arrangement was not found to suit by the politic mother, so Lucy was once more sent adrift. Mrs. Philip hearing this in a milder form, at the suggestion of her husband invited Lucy to spend a few weeks with them; but weeks had become months, and months were

her to prolong her visit each time she had made a faint movement to go away; so at last she declared, laughing, "she would not leave Merrion Square till they turned her out."

"Or get married, my dear," said the hospitable Mrs. Ireton, nodding pleasantly.

"The ancient Irish, Mrs. Philip," quoth the Doctor ponderously, "did not instil the necessity of matrimonial alliances into the minds of their fair virgins until they had procured for them suitable and eligible partners."

"Ah! you are *so* clever," sighed Mrs. Philip admiringly, considering herself extinguished nevertheless.

Lucy wrote out references for the Doctor's forthcoming work, arranged a chronological table, copied quotations, found appropriate headings for his numerous chapters, and, more difficult and trying still, listened with unwearying patience to his verbose dissertations on subjects in which she felt no interest, and on which the unconscious speaker was miles and miles at sea.

She undertook the housekeeping for her aunt, who willingly resigned in her favour, and to whom years of experience had brought little or no increase of knowledge, and the establishment was bettered by the change in the opinion of every one except the servants, who would have preferred the continuation

of the *ancien régime*. The Doctor insensibly felt the benefit of the change. The domestics felt it too, though not in quite so satisfactory a manner for themselves. She kept Mrs. Philip's knitting-basket in order, "took up" her "dropped stitches," and prepared her worsted for use. It was a comfortable home for a homeless girl, and Lucy duly appreciated comforts, and wisely determined to enjoy them as long as it lay in her power. The part she had elected to play was by no means difficult, as both the Doctor and his wife were unsuspecting, thoughtful, kind, and generous. They acknowledged all her efforts to please with such genuine courtesy that even to a more designing girl than Lucy it would have afforded something of pleasure to render them service. To Philip the younger she was subservient, gratifying all his caprices, wishes, and wants quietly, as a matter of course, perhaps, also of policy, for did he not reign paramount in the home in Merrion Square, grandly patronizing his uncle and aunt and exercising his suzerainty over Lucy as a sultan might over the favourite of the harem? To me he attempted to enact condescension, but failed.

After a long silence, during which nothing could be heard except the scratching of the Doctor's pen and the click of his wife's knitting-needles, the former closed his manuscript. He turned to the fire thoughtfully and sat with bowed shoulders, stretched-out legs, and hands buried in his pockets. A new theory had arisen in his mind on the subject of the Round Towers. He wanted to think it out so as to adapt their former uses to *his* ideas. After some time he sighed deeply, then attacked the fire viciously with the poker, as if

night. She then resumed her seat and pensive attitude. Never forgetful of his courtesy, he thanked her with a grave bow for this attention to his habits, and, as a matter of course, so sanctioned, his wife nodded and smiled her delighted approbation. The fair recipient of these thanksgivings acknowledged them with infinite grace in a sweetly deprecatory manner, but soon again the cloud of discontent overshadowed her brow. I marvelled much what could be the cause of this change. I knew little of her past personal history; had only met her a few days before and for the first time, as Doctor Ireton had never invited me beneath the shadow of his roof-tree save once since our memorable adventure by the sea, and that once I was sent home in disgrace, as related. Very graceful she looked reclining there, her shapely head resting on her delicate hand: her every attitude, nay, her slightest movements were instinct with that peculiar elegance only seen in forms exquisitely proportioned.

Said Mrs. Philip, in a soft voice, as deprecating the presumption of her venturing an opinion,—

“I suppose my nephew Basil will be here by the evening mail?”

Now this was not a very violent assertion of the liberty of thought, seeing she had received a letter stating the fact from Mrs. Frank Ireton of Dhu Hall that very morning.

"Your supposition, Mrs. Philip, is very just, though neither marked by much profundity or originality of conception," responded her husband sententiously.

"Ah! you are *so* clever," again sighed the lady addressed, once more annihilated and on the whole rather liking it.

"May I venture to hope," continued her husband, taking her hand with a simplicity of manner strangely at variance with his elaborate diction, "that every accommodation my poor mansion can boast of has been duly placed at my approaching nephew's disposal. High and open-handed hospitality have ever been the peculiar, I may add, very exceptional characteristics of the denisons of our native land, (if I may so apply a denomination—not—hem! not strictly applicable,) even before the landing of the Phœnicians on—correct me, Mrs. Philip, if I am wrong—"

"Wrong!" repeated she, aghast at the supposition.

"On the coast of Galway, or the descent of Mile-tius. Some suppose we are one of the lost tribes of the house of Israel."

Mrs. Philip immediately thought of Shadrach, and considered it might be possible, but did not venture to say so. He continued,—

"But I, with all humility, hold this latter opinion to be utterly untenable. What characteristics have the two nations in common, if we except, perhaps, their mutual tendency to idolatry? What is the grand end and objects of the Jews' existence? To gain money. What of the Irishman's? To spend it."

"Ah! you are *so* clever."

When last we met Rump he was a boy, now he was a well-grown, handsome man. His hair, thick and wavy, was in colour like the black purple of the raven's wing with the sun's glint upon it, his forehead high and intellectual, his eyes large and lustrous, his nose straight and well-formed, a handsome mouth with full, red, and somewhat sensuous lips. Handsome as a lad he was eminently so as a man, and perfectly, though not obtrusively, conscious of the fact. His tastes were fine and somewhat effeminate. He was fond of the sweet, flowing, melodious songs of Italy, and sang and played extremely well. He painted better than some artists, and wrote poetry. For hunting, shooting, athletic exercises, or what are commonly termed manly sports, such as I loved, he had no taste. He was fond of mild riding in the park, kept two thorough-bred horses, and looked to admirable advantage on horseback; but as for following a fox across the country or riding a steeple-chase over a well-fenced district, after the manner of his fathers, it was an achievement he never dreamt of. Though constitutionally indolent and effeminate in the very fineness of his finer tastes, he could not be strictly called an effeminate man. Had he been so, would the women have adored him? And as Sir Fretful Plagiary says, "They are the best judge after all." They never admire any quality in a man which is a peculiar, crowning grace in their own sex

—not even modesty. So, at least, I have heard. He threw himself negligently on the couch against which Lucy reclined. She was about to rise from her low seat when he placed his hand on her shoulder and gently pressed her down. She complied, seemingly more from the habit of passive obedience than from any inclination, for I could see by the aid of the glowing fire that the red blood burned hotly in her cheek, and there was an angry look in her eyes, which, however, she studiously averted from him.

“I’m tired,” he said, stretching himself to his full length, and arranging the cushions daintily. “It’s a horrid bore bidding a lot of one’s friends ‘good-bye;’ it makes one almost feel sorry at parting with them.”

“A sad, incontrovertible proof of our degeneracy,” said the Doctor. “In the grand days of old, the Irish chieftains quaffed meadh—”

“Ah!” quoth Philip irreverently, “we have better wines now, at least, than our dead sires could boast of. That’s an advantage, at any rate. Fancy Lucy here bidding me good-bye with a full beaker in her hand.”

“I did not say the winsome ladies of past generations—”

“Tipped,” suggested his nephew, seeing him at a loss for a word.

“Philip!” remonstrated his aunt, in mild reproach.

“Another proof of our hopeless declination, when levity and ridicule ride rampant, when—hem! the noblest qualities of our nature, reverence for the



honour of being appealed to.

“Brava, aunt! Let that sentence get into print and my respected uncle will be—what would I say, Lucy?”

“Immortalized, I presume,” returned she in a tone of grave displeasure. “Mr. Philip Ireton is always in the right; yet he will pardon me if I say his better taste ought to have suggested to him the impropriety of such an appeal to me.”

“Philip suggesting improprieties!” exclaimed my aunt, horrified.

“Mrs. Philip! you don’t understand,” said my uncle, with severe dignity.

“Of course I don’t,” assented she meekly. “Oh! you are *so* clever.”

“Lucy only meant to infer,” he began in his most explanatory tone; but here he stopped abruptly—she had spoken in so low a voice, he had only heard her imperfectly, and had not the slightest idea what she “meant to infer.” But his simple faith in the chivalry of the Iretons was too great to allow him to suppose that a gentleman of their name, or any name, could ever forget the respect due to a lady. Ah! had he been alive now—

Philip raised himself on one elbow, and regarded Lucy with a puzzled expression. She appeared not to notice his scrutiny, but sat gazing steadily

before her. He sank back amid the velvet cushions with a soft laugh.

"I don't understand you, Miss Graham."

"Because Mr. Philip Ireton does not choose to understand," she said in a whisper, turning suddenly to him, "or he might know that I am under too deep a sense of obligations—"

"Oh! is that it?"

"And have too much loving gratitude to turn the foibles of my benefactors into ridicule."

"So you acknowledge my good uncle's antiquarian research is only a foible, eh! Miss Graham? With all my ridicule, or what you will, I never confessed *that*."

Lucy rose and went to the other window. Holding back the heavy curtain, and pushing aside the blind, she stood looking out into the darkening square; Philip's eyes followed her with an inquiring expression. In her manner there was evidently something of which he had had no previous experience, and he marvelled at its strangeness. Was it possible this fair dependent on his uncle's bounty had viewed his flattering attentions in a warmer light than he thought they warranted? and had hoped to—no, not win—that would have been preposterous. Did she love him? Was she sorry at his intended departure to foreign lands, and angry, not only that no expression of regret fell from his lips, but that he was even glad that it was so near at hand, when the knowledge of it only gave her pain? Well, certainly she was very lovely and graceful, and to be loved by a charming girl without the trouble of loving in return is, doubtless, very delightful and satisfactory.

and shall probably be away for more than a year. Who knows what may happen in that time? You may be happily married"—she started—"and I—ah! I'll not attempt divination in my own case. Don't let me go with the thought we parted in anger."

"What can it matter to *you* whether I am angry or not? Angry? What cause have I to be angry with any one, much less with you? You have graciously condescended to patronize me since I have helped to rob you by sharing Dr. Ireton's hospitality. What would it be but arrogance in me to presume to be angry with the supreme Mr. Philip Ireton?" Though her voice was subdued, it was full of careless scorn.

"The supreme Mr. Philip Ireton never felt his supremacy so deeply as now, when it proves he has sufficient interest in Miss Graham's esteem as to be able to excite her displeasure. We are seldom chafed by friends for whom we care but little."

"Displeasure, if you insist on your opinion, is but a sorry proof of esteem," she retorted, with a derisive smile.

"An ugly one, as jealousy is of love," returned Philip, with a searching look that brought the hot blood into her face. She laughed uneasily. I saw

that she felt he was her master. A man always is of the woman who loves him, and for whose love he has no return.

“Love—jealousy!” she repeated. “Ah! these are words which find no place in my vocabulary. What has dependent poverty to do with love or jealousy?”

Philip felt this was trenching on dangerous ground, so wisely beat a retreat; but he did so as Mr. Philip Ireton.

“Well, there is one subject we *must* agree upon,”—with lofty condescension,—“you must acknowledge, I have to thank you for many pleasant evenings. You made this house brighter with your presence. Was that no boon to merit gratitude? I shall often miss those pleasant evenings.”

“I have amused you,” she said, with a sort of self-contempt, though his words had stung her to the very soul. “I can sing, play, and read passably—for an amateur. Having nothing better at hand, I was a facile toy, and as a toy you used me—I mean regarded me. Do you think, sir, I only played or sung for your especial gratification? or read aloud your poetry to please your vanity alone? Was there no one else present as worthy of consideration as Mr. Philip Ireton?”

“I may reasonably suppose so without being accused of any particular augmentation of vanity, seeing you only sang Italian and played operatic arrangements, whereas my respected uncle only likes Irish music, which he doesn’t understand, and my worthy aunt doesn’t know one tune from another, and—” he hesitated.

“Proceed.”

could see the angry flash of her eloquent eyes.

"Not only admirably, but with a generosity, grace, and delicacy wholly peculiar to—himself." She courtesied profoundly, and then broke into a light musical laugh, a laugh such as I once heard a titled lady give when she was putting strychnine into my wine.

"At least he has proved one thing," said I, meaningly, "that he fully *appreciated* your efforts to please."

She turned her eyes quickly upon me—I *guessed*—but could not mark their expression.

"Et tu, Brute!" she exclaimed with the same light musical laugh.

"But, pardon me, Mr. O'Hara, *misunderstood* would have been the truer term. I have been arraigned before the High Court of Courtesy, and found guilty of the grave misdemeanour of gratitude in pleasing my kind host by my efforts to amuse his adopted son, and he pleads guilty of being amused. What punishment do you award to the culprits, sir?" addressing the Doctor.

"Marriage. Among—eh?" said my uncle, roused by the sound of her voice, from a happy sleep in which he had evidently been dreaming of his antiquities. My aunt, who was comfortably dozing by his side, her fingers moving as if engaged in their customary occupation, awoke at his movement.

"Of course, my dear. Ah, you are so clever!" in answer to some passing thought in her slumber, and trying to look preternaturally wide awake.

"Decision disputed, the prisoners appeal to a higher court; but it is time to dress for dinner;" and with a slight quiver on her mocking lip as she viewed Philip's discomfiture at his uncle's unexpected response, she swept out of the room singing Fidalma's air from "*Il Matrimonio Segreto*," with a ring of defiance in it never intended by author or composer. Parthian-like and woman-like she shot her keenest arrows in retreat.

Mystified, the Doctor retired to his dressing-room. Mrs. Philip slowly went to hers, muttering "Dispute, prisoners, what can it all mean?" and knitting as she went.

"What does it mean?" laughed Philip sarcastically, "why, that the grapes are high and unattainable."

I could see he was much annoyed, particularly so that I was witness to their dramatic little scene. I was hardly aware that Lucy knew of my being in the room till she addressed me, and was glad she was so. The whole interview perplexed me. There must have been some slight, intentional or otherwise, on Philip's part, to make her appear in what I now felt to be her natural character, or some motive hidden deep in her own breast, some lately born inducement to enact the new *rôle* she had, for the first time, assumed. Before she had been so complying, so anxious to please him, so obedient to his slightest whim, so mild beneath his arrogant dictation, it annoyed and vexed me. That which appeared only simple and natural in Mrs. Philip

were unattainable," as he conceitedly expressed it.

It caused me some surprise that my uncle was so imprudent as to sanction the presence of a girl so beautiful as Lucy as a constant inmate in the same house with Philip, especially as she was portionless. But he knew his favourite nephew better than I knew him then. Even if he should glide into love with a dowerless girl, he felt assured Philip would never sacrifice his interests, nay, compromise his whole future by marrying a penniless wife, were she talented as the nine muses, "rolled into one," and beautiful as Venus Aphrodite.

## CHAPTER V.

### BASIL IRETON'S FIRST LOVE.

A **SPLENDID** fire roars up the chimney. The drawing-room in its holiday attire (i.e. divested of chintz and muslin) is all ablaze with wax candles as if for a *grand réunion*. The grand piano is open, chairs of all eccentric forms symmetrically disarranged, and all in honour of the arrival of Basil. Doctor Ireton was sublime in the respect he entertained for the family name, and always received an Ireton, however remote the affinity to the Iretons of Castle Ireton, with solemn state.

As Basil and I entered (I had met him at the coach-office, Sackville Street) he was sitting, in full dress, with a volume of his favourite study in his hand, but not reading. In her customary place, arrayed in all the glories of bright blue poplin, with scarlet and green bows, and gorgeous with yellow roses in her lace cap, sat Mrs. Philip. She invariably sported yellow roses on all festive occasions, in graceful remembrance of the adornments she wore the happy evening on which she won Dr. Ireton's hand.

Philip lay on the sofa reading, with his head



which was ignored. All his surroundings were very handsome, and very handsome he looked amid his surroundings.

The Doctor received his nephew with more real warmth than I had anticipated, and Mrs. Philip following suit kissed him, to his manifest discomfiture, as he was not prepared for this in her unusual display of affection. Philip, without altering his position stretched forth his hand—small, white, and jewelled, like a woman's—and with a patronizing smile, inquiring, "How were they all at Dhu Hall?" resumed his book, scarce waiting for a reply. The pleased look which had brightened Basil's face at the kind reception he had met with from the Doctor and his wife, faded away as he turned from his brother with a gentle sigh. Casting an angry look at the occupant of the sofa, I took Basil by the shoulders and forced him into an easy chair, telling "the old boy to make himself comfortable, as he must be fatigued after his long journey."

"You see, uncle, Hardress is tyrannical as ever, and the worst is he's such a giant, it's no use a fellow resisting," said Basil, smiling.

"Though Mr. O'Hara," said my uncle sententiously, "cannot strictly be called an Ireton, yet he shares their blood, and all nearly allied to them are tall and—," he suddenly stopped and attacked

the fire vigorously, ever his custom in a dilemma when practicable.

"Not all," replied Basil, colouring slightly. "How is your book getting on?"

The Doctor was himself again : once launched on his favourite topic with an interested listener, and he sailed away regardless of wind, storm, or disastrous shipwreck. His wife, in her accustomed seat, smiling benignantly, and knitting more furiously than ever, as was her wont when anything particularly pleased her husband. She listened as if her whole soul was in the discourse. No fine lady ever gave ear with more perfect gratification to the delicate innuendoes which flattered away the reputation of a popular rival, than did she to a *résumé* of ancient lore heard for the one thousand nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, and never understood. There was one peculiarity about my aunt's worsted, it had always the cockled up appearance of having been used before, giving one the idea that she was a sort of modern Penelope, who, for some dark and inscrutable reason, unravelled at the mysterious hours of night all she had interlinked during the day.

Basil had dressed and dined before coming to his uncle's, so had not yet seen Lucy Graham.

Presently she entered in a white dress, fitting lightly round her small throat, with a single wild rose in her abundant night-black hair.

"O what a tower of grace and loveliness,  
And stateliness, and absolute command,  
She bursts upon mine eyes!"

All traces of her former excitement had disap-

being more than simple admiration, though he must have frequently seen her under similar conditions.

I felt angry at myself for having entertained an uncharitable thought of one so fair and seemingly innocent, yet that "light musical laugh" recurred again and again to my memory as a prophetic warning.

Instinctively I turned to Basil. He had risen on her entering, and stood gazing on her in rapt surprise. His hair, like pale gold, brushed back, fell in thick, short curls behind his ears and round his neck, and revealed the fine shape of his forehead. The contour of his face was less striking than Philip's, but he had a beauty of expression his elder brother could not boast.

The Doctor left his seat and approached Lucy.

"Why," said he, with heavy courtesy, "you are as fair this evening as Fionnuala, the daughter of Lir, before her transformation. You must allow me to introduce my third nephew to you."

"No," she said, with a smile, placing her hand in his; "you must introduce *me* to Mr. Basil Ireton—as I presume it is."

This gracefully implied pre-eminence of an Ireton by a grand-daughter of the late Sir Phelim O'Shaughnessy flattered the Doctor's weakest point, his family pride, but he gallantly determined not to be outdone in generosity. He murmured something about the

respect due to a lady, but did not altogether ignore the family claim to precedence. The Doctor having performed his self-imposed duty, Lucy was about to curtsy, when suddenly appearing to recollect herself (it was very artistically performed), she held out her hand to Basil with her most charming smile, and said,—

“I have heard so much of Mr. Basil Ireton from Mr. O’Hara, I almost feel we are old friends.”

“You must take with reservation, Miss Graham, everything favourable Hardress may say of me; he speaks from his affections, not his judgment,” he replied, pleased with her gracious manner.

“I neither speak from affection nor judgment—” I began.

“From intuition, then?” she asked; oh, so very sweetly!

“No; simply from knowledge. But, remember, in magnifying my most particular friend, I indirectly enhance my own discrimination. So Basil, my boy, don’t take *all* the compliment to yourself.”

He laughed, and said, “If such were the case, he would never dispute any amount of praise I might award him for the future.”

That the knowledge of his brother’s character should be made known to her by me, seemed to annoy Philip, his estimation of it ranked so infinitely below mine. He looked upon him as something so vastly inferior to himself, I should hardly have thought he would have cared what report any one might give.

I placed a chair for Miss Graham near to Basil’s. They talked long and pleasantly together, I breaking

terly she drew him out, without appearing to do so; led him to talk of himself, his tastes, in a manner I had never heard him talk before. She appeared so interested in her companion, and he so pleased and happy, I felt doubly angry with myself for ever harbouring a doubt of Lucy Graham. There was nothing of coquetry or a desire of display in her manner. It would seem, having claimed him at first as an old friend, she was simply asserting the prerogative she had assumed, and treating him as such.

Philip had taken no part in the conversation, but I remarked, though he still held his book, he had ceased reading. At length he became restless; his right was being invaded, the right of undivided homage, and another was about to be set up in his stead as an object of attention. Lucy was listening more intently than ever to something Basil was saying, with a feminine reserve, blended with a gentle consideration very pleasant to look at.

Philip, removing the ebony table with rather more noise than necessary, drew a low stool to its place. He was still on the sofa.

“Won’t you resume your old seat, Lucy? This is our last evening.”

To my surprise, she rose quietly and sat down in the seat he had placed for her, still with her profile half turned towards Basil. There was no pause, no

hesitation, and, above all, no shadow of resentment, coldness, or *hauteur* in her manner. It was as if she had—no, not simply forgiven, but altogether forgotten their interview in the afternoon—dismissed it from her memory as something unworthy retention. Yet—I might be mistaken—I fancied I detected a slight compression of the lips, a faint increase of colour on her rounded cheek.

Basil's astonishment at such an unusual proceeding even exceeded mine, though very different causes excited our wonderment.

"Engaged?" he whispered.

I shook my head in denial. He seemed to look pleased; why, I had no idea.

"You were saying—" she said, looking at Basil. The question coming so pertinently after his remark, threw us both into unutterable confusion; but I found afterwards she was simply referring to the interrupted conversation.

There was a gleam of triumph in Philip's eyes; his power was reasserted, and the repentant beauty once more at his feet. Others might claim her regard for a time, but a word from him brought the wanderer back to her thralldom. He was mistaken as to the measure of his success, for though she turned her face fully towards him when he spoke to her, having replied, she immediately brought it back to its former position, and addressed herself to Basil. He became annoyed and petulant. Somewhat sarcastically, he asked her to sing—an Irish song, to please his uncle.

"No," she replied, rising, and going to the piano. "I will sing for your uncle to-morrow night."

preferred. Of course he incontinently protested he had no choice, and to prove the correctness of his statement, immediately selected one. It was "Tu questa tomba oscura."

Philip, who had risen, on her appeal to his brother threw himself back in his seat with an impatient gesture.

"It is too low for my voice, and transposition spoils its effect. O pray, let it remain." Basil had placed it on the brackets, and was about to remove it. "As it is your particular favourite, I will attempt it."

Then ignoring the musical young lady's inevitable prelude, and wisely contenting herself with that of the composer, she began.

Why young ladies on sitting down to play or sing, no matter what the character of the piece, merry or sad, grave or gay, *should* always make a violent and unprovoked assault on the defenceless keys, rushing madly from the one extremity of the instrument to the other, was ever past my powers of divination. Surely to interpret the composer's thoughts truthfully, would be a finer evidence of skill than— Ah! I beg their pardon—the young ladies, I mean. I am making no allowance for the originality of genius.

Lucy launched her voice on the flowing tide of song. She possessed a full, clear, telling soprano,

and sang with an amount of passion and purpose rarely met with in a professed artist, how much rarer in an amateur. Basil was entranced. He had never heard song so beautifully interpreted before, nor interpreted by so much beauty. The last "*ingrata*" was given with an intensity and power that even affected me, and the song was over. The silence that followed—more significant of the singer's triumph than any applause—lasted a few minutes, then Basil requested her to sing it again. He had stood beside her, but now moved behind her, so that she could not see his face. But Lucy had marked the effect her performance had produced upon him, and on its repetition, her voice increased in volume, her expression in tenderness. As we were breathlessly awaiting the despairing abandonment of the "*ingrata*," she suddenly turned to Philip, and in a half-sarcastic, half-playful manner, substituted "*ingrato*," in its stead. He bowed and laughed, but I could see he was vexed. Appealing to me, Lucy said,—

"He deserves that, does he not, Mr. O'Hara, for his rudeness at the window?"

"That is but a light punishment, which infers a compliment."

"A compliment! how?" she inquired.

"Does not the accusation of ingratitude imply a favour conferred? And if the very memory of a boon from Miss Graham be an honour, how much greater the grace bestowed," I replied, bowing.

"Alas, for the chivalry of the nineteenth century! Men now simply defend themselves, or one another. I shall never appeal to you again, Mr.



deeper meaning lay beneath my words. Lucy sang again a song of Basil's selection. It was Beethoven's; "O Perfido," I think it is named. The *scena* was given with marvellous dramatic power, the "Per Pieta" being the perfection of entreating pathos. No singer can ever do justice to her powers with an inattentive or unsympathetic audience, but hers were at her feet, and she revelled in her triumph. Yet never did *prima donna* calculate more nicely the golden value of her notes, while she appeared irresistibly inspired by the sublime worship of her art, than did Lucy calculate the matrimonial worth of her efforts to subdue; yet one would have imagined every faculty engaged in rendering the melody, which came fraught with such meaning from her lips. But I did not know this at the time. Entranced by the spell of the syren, Philip forgot his dignity and petulance, and asked her to sing with him. True to the plan she had pursued all the evening, she turned to Basil, and said, "Would *you* like it? Perhaps you will sing with me first?" He, of course deferred to his brother, so the latter was nearly relapsing into his ill-humour. Philip possessed a fine barytone voice. It was one of great power and beauty, skilfully developed by artistic training.

Their voices blended together so harmoniously, it begot in me a vague sort of speculative wonder, if their lives were "joined together," would they so

well accord. Then Basil was tempted to take part in a trio, and finally, I was pressed into the service, and rolled in my rough bass, like a juvenile Titan "with a bad cold." The quartette selected was the "Chi mi frena." So long as my part was plain sailing, and simply a duo, with key-notes, thirds, and sixths, I sailed along smoothly enough, but when I came to the rocks and shoals of incidentals, and accidentals, and the breakers of interrupted passages, I was hopelessly shipwrecked and cast away for ever. Being elbowed by Philip, by no means gently, to proceed, I said "I was so enraptured by the beauty of their performance, I was compelled to stop and listen." A speech which argued more for my politeness than veracity. Lucy was to me an enigma, for whose solution I had no cue. I had come to four distinct but antagonistic conclusions about her during the last twelve hours; the first that she loved Philip; the second, that she did not love, but would gladly win him; the third, that she had no such desire; the fourth,—that I knew nothing whatever of the matter.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BASIL'S ENGAGEMENT.

PHILIP went off next morning. We had assembled in the hall out of compliment to his departure. My vacillating mind, not made up with respect to Lucy's feelings, I watched her narrowly as the carriage drove from the door. She may have been a little paler than usual, but there was no greater display of emotion than one parting with an acquaintance with whom there had been a close intimacy might reasonably manifest; and, above all, there appeared no affectation of carelessness, or attempt at concealment. Noticing my look, she saw she had baffled me, and smiled. I accepted it as a challenge, or was about to accept it, when she forestalled me, turning to Basil,—

“I am sorry Mr. Philip is gone. We shall miss his voice in our trios,” utterly ignoring, in a barbarous manner, *my* musical attainments.

“Is that the *only* way in which Miss Graham will miss him?” I asked.

“O no!” she replied readily; “he's pleasant, well-informed, clever, and companionable—a rare combination; but then I shall have much more

leisure for my favourite pursuits, unless Mr. Basil is equally exacting; you must not try me *too far*;" with a slight laugh. "I have been taught the pleasing lesson, it is a dangerous thing for a young lady to endeavour to amuse; she only renders herself liable to ungenerous misconstruction. Don't you think so, Mr. O'Hara?" appealing to me pointedly.

In her desire to make a raid on the enemy's country she laid open her weak point of defence.

"Decidedly not, Miss Graham; unless there is something more than doubtful in the manner the endeavour is made, or in the end to be attained," I replied.

"A worthy mind never misinterprets an action of true courtesy," she returned, with something of hauteur in her manner.

"Alas! for the chivalry of the nineteenth century," repeating the words she had used the night before. "Miss Graham's manner would imply she accused me of—"

"You? O, I was not thinking of you!" and with a slight shrug of her shoulders she passed out of the hall.

"I think you have offended her," remarked Basil. "What did you mean?"

"Nothing particular, my dear boy; or, rather, I haven't quite made up my mind as to my meaning just yet."

"Beware! these bickerings are very suspicious."

"I have a talisman against all Miss Graham's charms; *you* know that."

will soon ring. I'll see you as far as the gates.

"I must say 'good morning' to Miss Graham." He coloured and hesitated.

"Miss Graham has forgotten your very existence," I responded not very politely, "so come along." And we went.

"Lucy was standing at the breakfast-room window as we passed. She smiled at me with a peculiar expression. I removed my hat.

"Whom are you bowing to?" inquired my companion.

"I hardly know."

"Hardly know!" astonished.

"No; whether it was to an angel or a devil. Bah! living in the house with Miss Graham and Philip has made me fanciful. So don't mind my cynicism, but come along, old boy."

He had come up to town to finish his collegiate course, and attend, in the first instance, lectures. He had been in college already for three years, but had only come up twice each year for a few days; and, although he had always seen Philip on those occasions, and a month or two in the shooting season at some friend's house, though neither were sportsmen (Philip going for fashion's sake, Basil to see his brother), this was the first time he had even been invited, or, indeed, seen his uncle since our ignominious dismissal from O—— some years back.

And this was how it came to pass he had never before met Lucy Graham.

Basil intended entering the Church. I belonged to that most unremunerative of professions, occupations, or under whatever category it may come, ycleped gentleman-farmer. Although our ages were about the same, somehow or other I ever considered myself much older, and more experienced in the ways of the world. In my great love for him I looked upon myself rather as his protector, than simply equal friend; and his very delicacy seemed to assert itself as a claim upon my stronger nature. There was no music that night. Basil had requested Lucy to sing, but she had declined in such a manner that denial itself seemed more gracious than compliance. She had resumed her habitual seat by the sofa. Was it habit, or design? She was dressed in pale blue muslin, without any ornament whatever, unless a small spray of forget-me-nots in her hair may so be called.

She looked so very fair, so innocent, as, with the white lids of her eyes drooping, and their long lashes sweeping her cheeks, she listened to something Basil was telling her in a low voice. I felt angry with myself for ever doubting her, and very penitent for having spoken to her as I did that very morning. That I had deservedly won her dislike I regretted; but might I not atone for the past by my future conduct. I was beginning to form a hundred good resolutions when they were all strangled in their birth. She had whispered, or more correctly speaking, spoken in a subdued voice to Basil. What was said I never heard. But I marvelled at the glad

through my very love for my friend.

"It is a pity your brother left so soon after your coming," she remarked. "You will miss him so much. Being only two, you must love each other very dearly." Although addressing herself to Basil she seemed to wish me to listen.

"I am fond of Philip, and regret his absence; but we have seen each other only at rare intervals—for brothers, since we were boys together," he returned regretfully.

"But the tie of brotherhood—" urged she (I fancied she saw the subject was an ungrateful one, yet pursued it for some determined purpose of her own), "in itself must be binding?"

"Has Miss Graham no brother?" returned he evasively.

"No; so far as family affection goes I am alone in the world, as Crusoe on his desert island," she said softly. "Is there any solitude so great as that?"

"Believe me, Miss Graham, there are some friendships which are stronger than any bond of brotherhood." He turned to me with an affectionate smile, as in confirmation of his words. "You have relatives?" again addressing her. There was a slight contraction of brow as she listened.

"Relatives are not always friends. These four walls contain all I know of friendship," pointing to my uncle and aunt.

"Pray don't say that," he returned earnestly. "Philip is, I'm sure, your friend, and—" amazed and confused at the unlooked for effect his words had produced, he paused. Not all her self-control could keep the tell-tale blood from flushing in her cheek, or throbbing in her temples. "I didn't mean—" he began, and then stopped, as trying, helplessly, to find out what he did *not* mean.

"Don't insult Miss Graham by an explanation; she perfectly understands your meaning," said I, most ungallantly rejoicing at her discomfiture.

"Perfectly, *now*," emphasizing the adverb. "And, even had my first foolish thoughts been correct, I would have to have thanked Mr. O'Hara alone for the quickness of my perception, not Mr. Basil Ireton."


I think my uncle missed Philip much, although he did not speak of him. He sat with pursed-up mouth and heavy brow, with a volume of "Giraldus" in his hand; his eyes were on the page from the sheer force of habit, but his thoughts were elsewhere. My aunt missed him more than any of his relatives. She knitted very slowly, and looked frequently at the deserted retreat among the violet velvet cushions; she would then sigh softly, her fingers move more deftly for a few seconds, then slower and slower, till, once more there was quite a little interval between each stitch; but, true to her traditions, she knitted on.

I was called away upon some legal business. On returning to Merrion Square, after an absence of a few months, I found that Basil and Lucy were engaged. Surprised he had not informed me of his happiness by letter, he said he could not forego the pleasure of



Still I was not quite satisfied. There was a subdued triumph in her very manner of receiving my congratulations which perplexed me; not the pride of a young girl who has worthily won the man she loves, and glories in the conquest, but that of a woman who, by tact and resolution, has secretly foiled an unacknowledged enemy who stands before her, and maugre his efforts shows he has been beaten.

All that night my dreams were fantastic and perplexed. Haunting visions of the young priest (how like Basil he was!) journeying to the college at Valladolid—which ancient university appeared in the likeness of an architectural monstrosity compounded of Castle-Ireton, Dhu Hall, Merrion Square, and Trinity College—and meeting on his way, when benighted, a beautiful female (oh, how like Lucy!) for whose blandishments he signed away his soul, and how the “ladie fair to see” forthwith became a fiend. Woman or devil, how like Lucy still! The sequel of the tale was not dreamt out, but in that heterogenous blending of identities so frequent in dreams, the priest merged into Basil, or, somehow or other, they did not become but *were* one. Horrified at the first foul transformation—howbeit the face was lovely still—Basil in his terror frantically threw himself over a steep precipice, and I, in the



desperate hope of seizing him and breaking his fall, plunged after, caught hold of him in mid-air, and in some way, only practicable in dreams, bore him safely to land ere he was impaled on the sharp and jagged rocks that lay like monsters on the watch below, with the white waves sweltering through their grisly ranks; then, as great joy and thankfulness filled my heart almost to bursting that my friend was saved, suddenly there arose around us a thick mist like a cloud and severed us, and when it melted away slowly into an opaline haze I saw I was alone. The skies were blue and clear, the waves were hushed and still, and the sun dying in the west. "like the memory of a well-spent life," when from the golden distance came a voice fainter and fainter and fainter, sighing "Farewell, farewell!"

"Return, return," I pleaded, while a cry, born of anguish, burst from my lips—I awoke.

Dr. Ireton and his wife congratulated Basil and Lucy, but said little else. His mother wrote kindly and affectionately to her—nay, warmly, considering she was dowerless.

Very beautifully Basil's character unfolded itself, as it were, leaf by leaf, beneath the genial influence of returned affection, like the rose keeping its sweetest petals to the last. He became less diffident, less self-conscious, more dignified in his bearing; his tenderness, his gentleness, his thoughtfulness for others all seemed to develop themselves more prominently day by day. Infrequent letters had come from Philip during his travels, and one at last arrived saying he hoped to be at home in a few days. In a few days he came.

Basil was supremely happy. Beholding all things

Philip appeared much improved. He was more sedulous to please, less selfish and exacting. Travel for many months, mixing with strangers, no longer being held as the little sun of a little system, had so far benefited him that he seemed, as the phrase goes, "another man."

Very great was his surprise at his brother's engagement, and he made no effort to conceal its extent. There was something of constraint in his manner when congratulating his brother, which I put down to the awkwardness (from its very rarity) he felt in congratulating him on anything.

Matters ran or rather glided on for a few weeks, when it became evident that Philip's old habits were slowly asserting their mastery over him once more. Though generally so self-possessed, Lucy had betrayed a little nervousness on their first meeting on his return, and had since become more thoughtful and reserved.

Philip on one occasion had requested her to sing with something of his old air of command. She did not speak, but, turning to Basil, seemed to appeal mutely to him as if consulting his wishes. Philip caught the look. He did not ask her again for some weeks. He tried to be witty at the expense of the lovers. Soon his pleasantry became tinged with sarcasm, then imbued with bitterness. Basil felt these attacks keenly, although he seldom attempted any counter-stroke, being unwilling to widen the

breach which still lay unclosed between their hearts. There was another attentive observer of these graduated changes in Philip's demeanour, and that was Lucy. She never accepted his challenge, or took up the gage, whether playfully or scornfully cast down, but observed him with a penetrating regard as if she would read his very soul. Then something like a faint smile would dawn over her whole face and increase and brighten as turning to her betrothed she whispered pleasant words in his ear.

"This love-making is decidedly a bore; it spoils all one's pleasure," so said Philip; a sentiment which hundreds out of the enchanted pale would subscribe to, I have no doubt. Then as attention after attention, which custom had elevated into a prerogative, was omitted by Lucy; when she appeared no longer anxious to obey his slightest behest without tacitly appealing to Basil, or forestall his unexpressed wish with the same delicate perception of his needs as formerly; no longer listened to him as "Sir Oracle," nor hastened to read to him, to cut the leaves of his new books, minister with silent solicitude—not the less sweet for being so silently expressed—to his most trivial desires; when these things, or, more properly speaking, the absence of these things affected him as a personal inconvenience,—still claiming the worship of an alienated faith;—made him an idol less supreme by creating a rival in his stead to whom all her service appeared directed, he began to feel neglected, then aggrieved, and lastly wronged.

This and much of what follows—not all as will be seen—was told me by Philip himself long after the

felt it, although I wasn't cruel enough to encourage her pardonable folly. Bah! I miss the 'toy'—that was her word—miss her every way, her looks, her smiles, her everything; and now, instead of those passionate love songs which thrill one with a lazy delight, we have nothing but those everlasting masses, requiems, and penitential dirges that Basil fancies he likes, as if life were not sufficiently tristful without making it worse by perpetually dwelling on suffering and death."

The idea that Lucy had really loved him took such a strong possession of his mind that it became a constantly recurring, if not a fixed thought, and with it came the not unnatural wonder how she could so soon, so easily transfer her affections to another. (N.B. Ladies have a peculiar facility in quietly effecting such transfers; finding the capital they expend not producing the desired interest they very properly invest in a new undertaking.—H. O'H.) He began to look upon her engagement as an act of faithlessness to himself, and, as a natural consequence, grew up in his mind the thought his brother had supplanted and wronged him. The evil feelings of envy and jealousy with which he had formerly regarded his blameless brother, and which had, in consequence of their frequent separation, lain partially dormant, strengthened and intensified by being in contact with a supposed actual wrong, for as such

his distempered mind now considered Basil's engagement.

In some extraordinary way, he began to look upon Lucy as his peculiar property. The rose had listened to the song of a wandering bird only for a little while; by-and-by, it would unfold the passionate crimson of its inmost heart, all bedewed with penitential tears, to its own loved nightingale again, and become all the truer for having wandered. So he had only lost Lucy for a time; he would win her back, and so repay his brother's treachery.

So, skilfully, by fine degrees, he began to reassert his old power over her; to quietly surround her, as it were, by the *sense* of his presence; encompass her with an atmosphere of strange tenderness, that, turn where she would, there seemed no escape from its subtle influence—turn where she would, there was no deliverance. Her love rebelled against her pride; her very thoughts turned traitorous, and, bursting from the channels into which they had been forced, flowed outward and onward to his very feet.

There was a curious blending of triumph and defeat in her air and bearing; she seemed proud to have proven the magic power of her loveliness over him at last. Angry and self-abased (paradoxical as it may be) that, struggle as she could, she felt herself succumbing to his old supremacy in the height of her victory. She had played a dangerous game, and found, in winning it she had lost herself. Juno-like, she would have taken revenge for her slighted beauty; Rodegunde-like, for her despised love; not by storm and tempest, not by fire and

when the duel between them first began, she might have conquered without being wounded herself. She had yet to learn that, although the spark of love lies buried beneath the ashes of disappointed hopes, so deep, so out of sight we deem it dead for ever, a breath from the lips of the one we cherished, blows the frail covering to air, and the revived flame leaps up brightly as of yore. As Philip's success became more unequivocal, in the very arrogance of his nature, his manner became less guarded. Basil saw his brother's assiduous attention to his *fiancée*; and, dreaming no ill, accepted it as a proof of his friendliness, unlooked for certainly, and so the more welcome.

The latter, his time being his own, was in constant companionship with Miss Graham, while the former was attending lectures, private tutors, &c. They sang together; the old masses were no longer in requisition. They walked together; and, more frequently still, rode out together. And the world smiled and said, "What a devoted brother-in-law Mr. Philip will make!" adding, "how very kind in him to patronize a dowerless sister; so delicate and gentlemanlike." But when the sad end was laid bare, the world shook its head and said, "Ah! it had always foreseen it. What a pity, Mr. Philip,

poor young man, should have been so led astray by that proud, artful, designing, penniless Lucy Graham !”

It would have pitied Basil, too, had his prospects been bright as those of his elder brother's. The world only wondered “if he felt it” for a little hour or so, and then did the kindest thing it could—forgot him.

Lucy was cautious as Philip was rash. She had a more difficult game to play, a higher stake to lose. I think, she feared my prematurely discovering how false they both were, more than she feared Basil himself.

With all her love for Philip, when she saw her conquest nearly claimed, she had a truer sense of the dishonourable parts they were both playing than he had. In his utter selfishness, he thought of nothing but his own personal gratification, and cared not what thorns he planted in his brother's path, so long as he could strew his own with fragrant roses.

And did he love Lucy? No; he had not even that excuse for his crowning guilt.



## CHAPTER VII.

### IN THE PARK.

As before recorded, Lucy was more cautious than Philip. She was resolved to give Basil no visible cause of offence till his brother had plainly declared his final intentions, and bound himself by every tie of honour to fulfil them. Did it never occur to her that as she was about remorselessly to break those ties, another might, even by her example, do the same? If, when about to do a wrong action, we, from no higher motives even than self, would pause and consider how, from the very force of our own example, that action itself is sure to rebound and wound us, how much less of misery would be in our own lot and in the destiny of others. She was too wise to surrender a positive advantage for a mere contingency; and though as bride of the heir of Dhu Hall, she could brave the odium of the world, and live down its reproach, she feared to confront its sneers and pitiless reproof, should she appear before it as defeated, and rejected even by the man whose love she had won and cast away.

Philip kept two horses, and Lucy and he rode out frequently together. If they went out so early as to

prevent our (that is Basil and myself) accompanying them, he and I generally rode to meet them on their return homewards. Latterly we had invariably missed them, no matter with what accuracy or precision we appointed time and place of rendezvous.

Basil began to be disquieted at the frequent recurrence of these disappointments. At first, he received Lucy's fragile excuses with a smile, but latterly with an air of calm disapprobation. But Lucy's penitence, when Philip was not present, was so winning, he was easily tempted to pardon. She, at these times, when his forgiveness was sealed on her snowy hand, would turn on him a strange yearning gaze, as if in accomplishing the end she proposed to herself, she would have fain, if possible, have spared him all pain; that is, if she could have warded no grief from me by so doing. I felt angry, and secretly accused Philip of wishing to wound his brother. The breach of tryst could not always be unintentional, the studied neglect the result of inconsiderate selfishness; but my thoughts never reached the suspicion of any deeper wrong. Excepting the above, even my jaundiced eye could see nothing objectionable in Lucy's conduct. For, although she began to pay observance to Philip's wishes once more, and perform many little services without reference to Basil's wishes or tastes—services small in themselves, but which borrowed a value from the manner in which they were rendered—they were done with such an appearance of self-compulsion, as if she forced herself to yield to his wishes, yet scorned herself for so yielding.

One bright afternoon "in the leafy month of

which with ourselves as our mother's part wife of some wonderful vintage years ago. Come, we'll off, and order our horses!"

We went. Intuitively, without a word from either as to the other's wishes, we turned our horses' heads towards the park.

A day more lovely never shone from blue and sunlit skies. The air was soft and balmy, with just sufficient motion to make the river ripple into laughter, and the green leaves rustle into murmurous music. We cantered through the park, and out for miles along the Lucan road; then turning our horses, rode back more slowly. On re-entering the domain—giving our horses in charge of a boy, to lead them about—we wandered beneath a clump of white thorns, all a-bloom, and threw ourselves down in the grateful shade, among the dying primroses and tall ferns. Basil was very thoughtful, and looked anxious and worn. He spoke very little; and when addressed, replied with an absent, preoccupied air very unusual to him. That some care sat at his heart I knew well, but did not attempt to force his confidence, knowing sooner or later it would flow freely out to meet my sympathy; so I waited patiently. My mind misgave me as to its import. No mention of Philip and Lucy was made between us, yet both were aware they were uppermost in each other's

thoughts. He lay supine, with his clasped hands supporting his head, gazing upwards through the interstices of the branches at the azure peeps of sky and silver cloud, while I amused myself lazily pelting with stems of grass and tiny flower-cups, the bright insects disporting in the soft summer air.

My attention was attracted by two equestrians riding slowly along, far to our right; even in the distance I recognized the forms of Lucy Graham and Philip Ireton. Basil had not perceived them from his position, and I know not what keen presentiment of evil forbade my telling him of their approach, or unconsciously restrained me from rising from my bed among the ferns, and going out to meet them, as at another time I should have done.

As they drew nearer to the clump which overshadowed us, they appeared to ride more slowly still. Philip was speaking earnestly, with one hand on the mane of the beautiful animal which carried his companion.

"I say, old boy," I said to Basil, "do you go and look for the fellow with our horses. I'm tired of mooning here. No; not that way"—he would have met the riders soon face to face—"he took the animals round the other side. Cut diagonally through the trees, and you'll see him. Quick, old boy; we must be moving."

As he disappeared among the gnarled boles of those ancient thorns, they drew near. Philip, letting the reins fall idly on the horse's neck, began to switch the delicate blossoms—pure as Alpine snows tinged here and there with the last faint gleams of the dying sunset—in a thoughtful manner. He

in his arms. He held her tightly pressed to his heart, then, in his mad delirium, imprinted a long, passionate kiss upon her upturned, glowing lips. She released herself, her cheeks aflame with shame; then, with a reproof so gently spoken as hardly to imply displeasure, having regained her saddle firmly, she once more raised herself, and, succeeding this time, broke off the desiderated cluster of starry flowers.

"I never like to be conquered," she said, as with some hesitation she offered it him. Holding out the breast of his coat, he seemed to ask her to place it there. With some small show of reluctance, she complied, and once again his lips sought hers. With the light flashing in triumph from her wondrous eyes, touching her horse lightly with her jewelled riding-whip (Basil's latest gift), she cantered away, Philip following in her wake. Plucking a sprig of hawthorn bloom, I pinned it carefully in my button-hole, and went in search of Basil and our horses.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BEAUMELLE.

It is early morning—early, at least, for the world of fashion—and Lucy is sitting in the drawing-room, reading and alone, as I enter. Philip had gone to secure seats for the performance of “Jane Shore,” with some leading star as the heroine. Basil was attending his lectures, and the Doctor engaged on his work in the library, with my aunt by his side, as usual. She (Miss Graham) had not appeared at the breakfast-table, excusing herself on the plea of a head-ache.

“May I hope you are better, Miss Graham?” I said gravely.

“Much better, thanks.” She looked up with her sweetest smile, but it faded from her lips as she met my glance bent sternly upon her. I had taken a chair and placed it right before her, not sitting down, but leaning with one hand on its back. There was a bright colouring of the cheek and tremulous motion of the lip. The latter indication of nervous dread quickly passed, as, with something of the old defiant gleam in her eyes, she raised her head in proud interrogation.

to the position I had taken. "Whether it be an honour or not is rather for you to determine than for me."

"You must know, Miss Graham," I continued, "the true and strong affection I have ever borne to your affianced husband; and, knowing it, for his sake—if there be any power in that conjuration *now*—you must listen and forgive me if I err in my judgment or dress my thoughts in unbecoming language. Believe me, my intention is not to offend."

Her face was white—white as a statue I had seen of Andromeda long ago, though lacking its sublime resignation. Her lips were in motion, as if forming some word, but no sound issuing from them was audible.

"You may think it strange, Miss Graham," I continued, "in my playing the monitor, and speaking on a subject which may presumably lie outside the scope of my experience."

She bowed slightly, as if she thought it was strange, but did not speak.

"Loving your affianced husband as I have ever done—" I continued.

"You have vaunted that before, sir," she interrupted me disdainfully.

"Because it is necessary you should know, feel, and realize it, otherwise that which I am about to say—solely for your own true happiness, and the happiness of another whose brightest hopes are cen-

tred in you—might, instead of this, appear to you studied—”

“Impertinence,” she concluded, as if supplying me with a lost word.

“I was about to say insult; your term will answer equally well,” I replied, ignoring the smile and marked inflection of voice that had accompanied her suggestion, and gave it a peculiar point. I was determined no slight on her part should move me to forget the great purpose in hand.

“If I vaunt, as you term it, my affection for Basil Ireton, it is because I am so proud of it. There is a pride in loving as well as in being loved, though with some there is a pride surpassing either—the pride of conquest. What do you say, Miss Graham?”

She gave me a rapid but searching glance, to discover whether there was any personal allusion in asking the question.

“Your assumed right to question me does not, I presume, comprehend an obligation on my part to answer,” she said coldly, her keen scrutiny ended.

“Say I have assumed a right, it is not for my own sake,” I urged.

“For whose, then?”

“For yours.”

“Mine?”

“And another’s, to whom you have irrevocably pledged yourself.”

“Irrevocably,” she murmured. “No, not irrevocably.”

“Not, perhaps, in the judgment of the legal world; but irrevocable in the eyes of all true, honourable men and women.”

She had been pale until now; but now the blood



add one iota to their innate sanctity in the sight of Heaven."

"A novel doctrine," with affected indifference; but I could see she clearly understood now why I had sought to speak with her.

"So much the worse for society it is so. We should have more truthfulness, honesty, and honour were it otherwise, and fewer wounded hearts and broken lives. I hold, between faithlessness to our spoken vows before marriage and disloyalty after marriage, the difference to be only in degree." I paused. "You must be aware how truly, how honestly Basil Ireton loves you. He has given man's grandest proof: he has asked you to share his life, won by your talents, grace, and acknowledged beauty; and not—"

"For my wealth," with a low, bitter laugh.

"A light thing is the love of such a nature as his," I continued, without noticing her interruption. "I hope, Miss Graham, you are worthy of it."

Although conscious of her own perfidy, her pride rebelled against even a hope that expressed a doubt.

"Has not *my* proof been given?" she demanded haughtily.

"Ah! it is different with women. Pardon me; if I speak plainly, I feel deeply."

"Well, sir, go on. The difference?"

"An honourable man proposes from love; an honourable woman may accept from circumstances."

"From which you would infer?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, Miss Graham, I leave the inference to you," I said, bowing.

"This room is chilly," she returned, rising. The sun was pouring through the unshaded windows his glowing beams. She was about to withdraw from the room, when I gently placed my hand on her arm to detain her. With a slight, impatient gesture she tried to shake it off, but, finding my grasp tighten, stood gazing proudly and steadfastly at me without speaking a word. She felt that any words I might have to say I would utter them, let her rebel or struggle as she chose. Seeing her knowledge of this so clearly manifested in her manner, I released her arm.

"Pardon me, Miss Graham, for detaining you; a few minutes will suffice for what I have to say. I am here this morning to speak a few words on Basil Ireton's behalf."

"Has Mr. Ireton commissioned you?"

"No! on mine honour, he knows nothing of my intention."

"Then I must decline listening to any un-sanctioned interference on the part of Mr. O'Hara."

"Shall I seek his sanction, then, Miss Graham? and in proof it is not an irrelevant request say I offered her a cluster of May plucked—let me see—about sunset yesterday evening, in the park." Taking the spray from my coat, I presented it to her; it had been preserved carefully all night in water. Seizing the flowers, she crushed them in her

but they fell on the carpet discoloured, leaving the blood-tinged stem naked and worthless. Unseen as it was, I replaced it in its former position. Did she read any significance in the action that her eyes questioned mine so intently? Would I so take up and cherish another offering she had taken and was about to reject, in defiance or contempt of her resentful scorn, and plant it before her eyes as not the less worthy because of her rejection, or to show how impotent was her wrath to move me from my purpose? A revulsion came, and she sank on a seat pale and trembling.

“Do you play the spy, sir?” in a low whisper.

“No! I was lying in the shade of the old trees. When I saw you approach I sent Basil to call our horses. I was the sole witness of your interview.”

“I was riding with his brother, sir,” struggling to regain her self-possession. “But I question—no, not question, but utterly deny—Mr. O’Hara’s right to play the Mentor. If in the jealousy of friendship, or some even less worthy motive, he is desirous of placing an insurmountable barrier between Mr. Ireton and myself, he could not hit upon a more effectual mode of procedure.”

“Had such been my motive, it is not to Miss

Graham I would have addressed myself, but to Basil Ireton," I returned quietly. "But I have that faith in her knowledge of character and understanding to feel Miss Graham spoke merely from a futile desire of wounding, and not from conviction."

"At any rate, you have marvellous faith in my forbearance. Enough, sir." She rose up once more, as if to leave the room, but remained standing still.

"And you may add," said I, affecting to take her words literally, "so much faith in her prudence and foresight that I feel assured for the future she will not risk her happiness by an indiscriminate bestowal of favours."

"Favours!"

"A bud plucked from its stem and placed in a gentleman's coat may seem a trivial offering. The value of a gift is not intrinsic—a flower is a simple boon. It is the manner the favour is graced in its bestowal and acknowledged which enhances the present and makes things worthless in themselves assume a fabulous estimation."

She looked like a hunted animal at bay that knows resistance is vain, yet still resists in its very despair.

"It is somewhat too soon to play the Romont," she said defiantly.

"An unhappy allusion, Miss Graham."

"Unhappy?"

"Because Beaumelle was a guilty woman."

"Guilty!" she cried, with a reckless vehemence, striking in her blind wrath the marble Hebe. It fell on the floor, shivering in pieces as if it had been glass.

“Coward!” she hissed between her closed teeth.

“Only less—it is a hard word—infamous—”

“Still coward!” she hissed as before.

“Than one who abandons her husband for the home of another.”

“Coward still!” as before. “Presume not to touch me, sir, and let me pass.”

“I will tell you this first; then you are free. Not all your scorn, your beauty, or your wrath can move me one hairbreadth from my fixed determination that you shall hear me out. Though you stand so proudly before me, with the glow of passion crimsoning your cheeks, with strong resentment at your heart and lightning in your eyes, I will speak this. You must ride no more alone with Philip Ireton, or, be the consequences what they may, I will tell aloud of the shameless scene enacted beneath the hawthorn’s bloom. I will stand between Basil Ireton and all possible wrong, nor leave his true heart to be the mere plaything of a selfish sybarite and an unscrupulous coquette.”

If ever murder glared through a woman’s eye, it looked through Lucy Graham’s then.

“Now, Miss Graham, you may go.”

“Guilty—unscrupulous! Your vocabulary is choice. I congratulate you on its excellence and force, however questionable its taste. If you are a gentleman, may I trouble you to open the door?”

Thanks. You have pleaded your friend's cause admirably, but with what effect remains to be proved. We shall soon see."

"We will."

"We *will*," as with an air of proud exultation she swept past, making her exit with the dignity of a Rachel as Roxana.

## CHAPTER IX

### I SEEK PHILIP.

ABOUT half an hour afterwards I met Lucy coming out of the morning-room. She did not speak, but gave me a look of triumph as with a queenly grace she glided past. I entered the room and saw Philip standing with his head bowed upon his clasped hands, which were supported by the mantelpiece. He looked up when my steps smote upon his ear, but immediately resumed his former position without appearing to notice my presence. I saw at once Lucy had told him of some part of our interview, at least, and hoped he would mention it either in sorrow or in anger. I could then have appealed to his better feelings, or, failing to awaken them, speak boldly the full bitterness of my indignation—my horror of this unnatural undermining of his brother's peace. My mind misgave me when I thought of her triumphant smile. There was nothing of elation in *his* bearing—nothing of the exultation that proudly displays itself in a man's every look and motion who has gained an object for which he has anxiously striven, and which he would rather, in the strong desire of his heart, even risk his immortality than

lose. He was, on the other hand, more like one who had staked his all to win a prize and found how utterly valueless to him it was when gained. There was not a sound in the room except the buzzing of a fly at the window-pane, trying ineffectually to break through the crystal walls of its prison.

There is a silence more expressive and impressive than any speech—a silence which only seems to gather intensity by its being marred by such trivial instances as the above—the silence which is held between conscious guilt and its accuser when they first stand face to face in their relative positions.

With an exclamation of irritation he went to the window, and, striking the offending fly down with his perfumed handkerchief, crushed it beneath his heel as if it had been some venomous reptile that had stung him—an action, however trivial in itself, very suggestive of the actor's state of mind.

"I hate flies! Their buzzing irritates me. What was the fellow's name who couldn't sleep with a crumpled rose-leaf under him? I can believe it to be no fable. There are times when the very touch of so light a thing as a swan's down would gall one."

"You speak of something altogether outside my experience. Perhaps my temperament is too phlegmatic to be moved by trifles—too unrefined to extract a sedative for the jarring nerves out of the elaborated murder of a harmless fly," I replied drily. He coloured and looked annoyed.

"You're in a sarcastic mood this morning."

"No! sarcasm's not my forte. I'm in an honest mood, if you like—"

"Heaven defend me from the honest mood of my



guise of friendship or dishonest courtesy dare to trample upon a loving heart's happiness, and teach others the deceit they shrink not to practise themselves. Heaven defend me from such friends, indeed!"

With all his self-esteem and effrontery, his eyes wavered and fell, while the angry glow on his olive cheek told me my shot had been no random one, but had been sent home. Thinking of some way to bring the subject uppermost in my mind before him, I said,—

"I met Miss Graham coming out of the room."

"I believe Miss Graham has free *entrée* of the house," he rejoined, endeavouring to regain his self-possession. "I hope you don't mean to limit the privileges of Dr. Ireton's visitors." His laugh irritated me more than I cared to betray.

"Certainly not. Some seem to take peculiar advantages of their supposed immunity. It would be well if a line of demarcation were drawn between sanctioned liberty and unwarranted encroachment."

"You might add unbecoming officiousness," with a slight sneer.

"Just so," said I more coolly; "where would you place the dividing line?"

"So that it would have deterred you, in your officious zeal, from speaking to Miss Graham as you thought fit to do this morning."

He plainly saw I meant "to have it out with

him," so rushed into the encounter he knew it was vain to strive to avoid.

"Did Miss Graham tell you everything? I am glad to see you blush. There must be a marvellous degree of confidence between you, not so much with respect to the presentation of the May flowers as in her recurring to the fact again."

"By Jove! all the confidence is on your side, to have the courage to twit an innocent girl with such a natural circumstance."

"Natural! Oh, I wasn't aware you were her acknowledged lover."

"Acknowledged?" he repeated, shifting his position uneasily.

"Else where its naturalness? I understood Miss Graham was engaged to Basil, not Philip Ireton."

"So far as you're concerned, I presume Miss Graham may marry whom she likes," he returned with affected carelessness.

"Yes, so long as my friend escapes."

"What! you will prevent that marriage? You will tell Basil his *fiancée* committed the unpardonable crime of innocently flirting with her future brother-in-law," he said, with a derisive laugh.

"I will tell Basil nothing, unless his honour demands it."

"His honour!" repeated Philip indignantly.

"Why shrink to give our actions a name, when their performance brings no blush to our cheek. I tell you, Philip Ireton, you are stooping to play a most unworthy part; you are either deceiving Lucy Graham, or your only brother—most likely both."

"If the girl deceives herself or seeks to be

beat down my anger.

"It would not be very remarkable if she did," he replied indifferently.

"Remarkable—perhaps not—the term is too slight. It would be simply monstrous, that any one knowing him as she must know him, and winning his heart as she won it, could reject his love is to me incredible."

"This delicate, sensitive, dreamy brother of mine is not quite the admirable Crichton to the world he is to you."

"Perhaps not the world to which you and Miss Graham belong; but to the world that appreciates sterling worth—high principles and unblemished honour—" I suddenly stopped. Philip looked round and saw Basil standing in the door-way.

"I have interrupted you," he said, gently advancing towards us, "I did not mean to play the eaves-dropper, but I candidly confess I have heard a little; it may be, perhaps, as well I *have* heard, although my heart refuses to receive the statement as an unanswerable truth."

Philip, for the moment, confounded and abashed, turned to the window with no word of excuse or explanation on his hueless lips. It was reserved for me to say something, yet what to say without wounding him? At that moment I felt as if I could

better endure any personal sorrow than witness his. What to say without telling the dreary truth.

"I thought you were at college," said I lamely enough.

"I have just returned; one of the servants was going out as I reached the door, which accounts for you not hearing any knock. I was coming in here when the mention of a name arrested my step, the action was involuntary. It was a sudden, pained surprise held me, nothing more."

"And you heard?" a spasm as of keen anguish passed over his face. I could hear Philip holding in his breath lest he should lose a syllable of the reply.

"If she repents her engagement to one who, brother as he is, will be held simply as a foil to her great beauty, better repent now than hereafter." There was a faint colour in his cheek and his voice trembled a little as he spoke, "I have sometimes wondered—"

"Botheration! wondered!" I broke in with assumed roughness. "If we would wonder less about ourselves and our friends, we would be all the happier. We are as we are, and if society refuses to take us at our own value, let it accept us at its own and let us mutually agree to make the best of each other, and, if we can't, the fault is as much with ourselves as with society. Wonder! I used to be ashamed of my six feet so many inches of height, and make myself intensely miserable by wondering whether people would think I was the retired giant of the penny show; and went about with bowed shoulders poking my nose in the face of

I spoke so much, partly and chiefly to prevent Basil casting even an implied slight upon himself in the presence of a brother who made no secret of the estimation he held him in, and partly also to defer the scene I feared must follow his unexpected appearance; and yet what use? If the blow must fall, why delay the uplifted arm? One thing I was glad at—he was not aware of the treacherous part his brother had played, for a little while he was spared that pain at least: but sooner or later it must come.

“Philip, what do you know of this?” he demanded.

“Of what Hardress is talking?” he asked huskily.

“No! you spoke as one having authority for the assertion—that—that—” he turned his eyes appealing to me to finish the cruel sentence.

“Miss Graham repents her engagement,” I said in a low voice.

“I—I didn’t mean, didn’t say,” he stammered and paused, shrinking to *spea*k a falsehood, although he hesitated not to *act* one; then in a sort of desperation, “What do I know of Lucy’s feelings on the subject? is it likely she would make me her confidant?”

“You said ‘better now than hereafter;’ if repentance is to come, better now, indeed!”

What could Philip say to this, or what indeed could I say? Not a word.

"It seems so wrong to doubt her," he continued, seeing neither replied. Then turning to Philip with a smile which spoke more of sadness than hope, "Perhaps she estimates me more than you think possible; she accepted me freely. I think you are both wrong." He did not speak with the confidence of a lover secure in his lady's favour, "Unless—has she seen any one she likes better?"

I turned to Philip to whom this question was particularly addressed. He was silent. Basil repeated it in another form.

"Have *you* seen anything in her manner—or heard anything from—mind you—herself to lead you to suppose I have lost her love?"

Seeing something of Philip's old insolence beginning to reassert itself in his manner, and feeling that from him his brother would win no straight-forward, honest reply, I said suggestively,—

"These are questions which—if necessary to be asked at all—ought to be asked of Miss Graham herself."

"You are right, Hardress; her name ought not to be called in question in any way. I will see her;" and he left the room.

Yes, I saw it now. His eyes had been open all the time I was marvelling at his blindness. He had noticed how, little by little, she had been gradually withdrawing herself from his attentions; little by little, had appeared less anxious to gratify his tastes, to take less pleasure in his society. His very questioning showed the doubt had arisen in his

“ How ! ”

“ By honestly confessing all your manner makes me believe you know.”

“ Would any words have satisfied him but those spoken by Lucy herself ? ” he returned.

“ You are aware then she will cancel her engagement ? ”

“ Can any one answer for any woman’s actions,” he questioned with some bitterness, “ and least of all for Lucy Graham’s ? ”

“ And you are the man who has gained her love ? ” I exclaimed, as a strange sort of wonderment took possession of me, how, if he prized the winning, he could so speak of her he had won. “ Well, I suppose you should know, though your remark is hardly generous ; if your passions and not your heart have been stirred by her marvellous beauty. To me it would appear the more honourable course to relinquish the pursuit altogether, or, if you *must* win, win her honourably and charge *her* with no blame. If, to gain your ends, you must trample on your brother’s heart, spare your soul the sin of trifling with hers.”

So here was I, with my usual inconsistency, pleading Lucy Graham’s cause.

“ Had Adam never been tempted he would never have fallen.”

“ So you might have said of Eve had she never met with the devil.”

I went out into the clear air and bright sunshine, leaving Philip to his own reflections.

Now that the end for which he had flattered and lied was gained he shrank from the avowal of his great treachery ; for, gloze the matter over as he would, in the calm hour of midnight, when his past conduct was reviewed, it would take no other interpretation. He could not disguise from himself the truth, put it in what form he might, that he had deceived Lucy ; he felt her love to be valueless now he was assured it was his own. Like any other man of his type, he had sacrificed her to his vanity. It was true the end I had proposed to myself in seeking the interview with him had been frustrated by the unexpected presence of his brother, but, after all, his having overheard us could do no further harm than hasten on the inexorable fate.

It would appear after my audience with Lucy she had immediately, when the passion of resentment was strong within her, sought Philip, and in glowing colours portrayed the scene, and led him to believe that her character had been hopelessly compromised by my being witness of the greeting beneath the fragrant thorns. If she had been foolish or indiscreet—then she stopped, and lifting up her passionate, pleading eyes to his as if to say in him there was justifiable excuse for any indiscretion a virtuous woman might be guilty of—spoke of my declared enmity to her so helpless and unprotected, of my determination to frustrate her—no, not her happiness, but her marriage ; in short, played her studied



only brother, a falling off in honour, but also because that it could not in any way bring wealth or added dignity to the house of the Iretons or advance its worldly interests.

Whether Mrs. Philip Ireton would approve or not she never troubled herself to consider, knowing she would take her cue from her husband, and like a dutiful wife adopt her "lord and master's" judgment with most unquestioning faith. Should the thorns of opposition beset their way, she trusted Philip's influence with the old man would eventually make their path smooth—and, although adverse at first to the match, he would yield at last to the acknowledged ascendancy of his adopted son.

But herein Lucy erred. She mistook the nature of the Doctor's regard for his *protégé*. It was not that the latter was flattered, indulged, spoiled, ruined if you will, because he was beloved by his uncle; dear as one he had brought up, watched, guarded, tended, and from whom he had received affection, if not duty, almost filial. No, it was not for all this alone, but chiefly because he was an Ireton, one by whom the glories of that ancient race were, in some unaccountable manner, to be restored and transmitted to a long posterity.

For this purpose the idealist worked, hoarded, and

saved. From some dim perception of this his wife sat daily by his side watching for years the slow progress of an undertaking destined never to be finished, and knitted on.

But it must not be supposed the Doctor was a miser. He was too proud, too noble in his own way for that. He was simply guilty of the very un-Irish practice of living considerably within his handsome income, and only retaining five effective servants in lieu of a dozen useless underlings.

It was his object to leave his adopted heir a sum of ready money sufficient to clear his patrimonial estate of the mortgages with which his more imprudent brother had encumbered it, without touching the principal; this desirable end accomplished, bright visions of Philip obtaining a title and "wedding rank and gold" floated dreamily across the simple plotter's brain.

But should he, for whom he had pictured so charming a future, ruin the prospect by a *mésalliance*, why, the old man, in the bitterness of his disappointed hopes, would disinherit, cast him off for ever; in his revenge, buy up the securities upon Dhu Hall, render the property so worthless to Philip, he would be glad to dispose of it, then as a *grand coup* purchase it, and finally adopt Basil.

The former, with all his vanity and self-love, had some idea of this, but its possibility never dawned on Lucy's mind. Elated at the conquest she had achieved, though at the cost of some self-respect, marveling how she would break with Basil, she was pacing excitedly up and down her chamber when a servant announced that "Mr. Basil wished to see her

subdued voice, that the end she had longed for had arrived at last, yet, with all the contradiction of a woman's heart, she cast the blame upon *me* for perfecting that which she so ardently desired as to throw another brand upon the furnace of her hatred.

He spoke to her tenderly, lovingly, kindly, spoke to her of his radiant hopes which had become so interwoven with his web of life, giving it a glory and a brilliancy before unknown, that to destroy *them* were to annihilate its perfectness for ever. He offered to annul their engagement, to release her from all vows to him if her happiness depended on that deliverance, yet besought her to pause ere she accepted that offer. She did pause, but it was to congratulate herself the dreaded interview had ended so happily to her wishes and with such little trouble to herself, and, above all, that, in breaking her engagement, he and not she had taken the initiatory steps, and no mention of Philip had been made.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE DÉNOUEMENT.

BASIL felt stunned. He ascended mechanically to his private study. He sat there he knew not how long with a sensation of dull pain lying at his heart in which no individual thought or feeling was prominent, nothing but a sense of loss undefined and indistinct, yet burthened with the agony of some great despair. His study was over the drawing-room. The window was open, and the voices of happy children playing in the square, the roll of frequent carriages, the thousand busy sounds that haunt a large town, all streamed in upon him with the light breeze and merry sunshine. He rose and changed his seat, mechanically taking a book from its shelf as he did so, and so sat poring over the unturned leaf, whose characters appeared blurred and blotted in his sight. The morning turned to golden noontide. His thoughts began to assume a more definite form. The climax of the scene with Lucy, rather than its antecedent particulars, gradually resolved itself out of his mental obscurity and he mused vaguely with an apathetic sort of wonder how it was he felt so little. So golden noontide melted into purple

the vastness of the desolation, how tall and goodly those hopes had been. He did not appear at the dinner-table. Philip also was absent. It was supposed they had both gone to their several clubs; there was no talk of going to the theatre. So purple evening deepened into ebon night. His window was still unclosed. Approaching it to let the cool air beat on his fevered forehead, he heard voices below in the balcony—low, whispering voices. He recognized them, and with the recognition, like a flash of lightning, came the truth upon his brain. He looked out, and there, in the quiet starlight, he beheld Philip straining Lucy to his breast, and heard words spoken which revealed all the mystery of his desertion.

He drew back and sank down upon the sofa, his face buried between his hands he knew not for how long. A thought struck him. Suddenly starting up he descended to the drawing-room, but the lights were out and the actors gone. He sought his brother's chamber—it was empty.

Philip, on hearing Lucy's account of the interview between her and Basil in the full consciousness of his guilt fearing to meet the brother he had wronged and affected to despise, had gone out. When the excitement of Lucy's presence was gone he was miserable. Her nameless grace, her witchery, her love, all disappeared, and nothing but the fact of her faithlessness remained. Might she not deceive

him too?—was the constantly recurring thought which all his vanity could not banish. The magnitude of the wrong he had so wantonly done to his brother began to grow up in his mind in all its enormity, and with it came thoughts full of wrath against the partner in his crime. The guilt seemed hers alone, and he the unconscious victim of her arts. Had he truly loved her it would have been different, but having no true honest regard for her, his senses alone being the slave of her beauty, there was nothing, no extenuating circumstance left in his heart to plead her cause.

Basil returned to the drawing-room. Taking a match he struck a light, and relumed the extinguished lamp. Its glare seemed oppressive. Turning the flame down till only a faint blue star flickered about the wick, he sat down to wait. And so the ebon night began to brighten into silvery dawn.

The sharp click of a latch-key is heard ; a cautious opening and shutting of a door ; then Philip's stealthy footfall creaks on the stairs. Basil turns on the light and stands with his hand on the lock of the unlatched door. As Philip is about to steal past, guilty like, he opens it and says with forced calmness, "Come in, Philip."

There was a resolution in the tone in which these simple words were uttered, which the startled hearer had no power to disobey. The manner of the speaker appeared to bereave him of all volition. He had the faculty of obedience, nothing more.

I had entered the room with Basil at his earnest request. Although he had given me no reason for his wish, nor spoken any word during our long watching, nor even informed me for whom he

portend.

Philip came in, leaving the door ajar behind him. Another had witnessed his entrance. Lucy, feeling Philip's manner (despite some show of passion) to be anything but satisfactory, as he had left the house soon after their meeting in the morning, without one parting word, and only returned for a few minutes at night to leave her abruptly again. Somehow or other it had become known to her that Basil had witnessed, if not overheard, their meeting in the balcony; she became anxious, uncertain, unhappy. If her object should be defeated just when the prize was within her reach! if she could only see Philip first and warn him of her fears. So, she too, remained up, awaiting his arrival, and only to find him confronted by his brother, the circumstance, of all others, she dreaded. She glided downstairs like a shadow, and crouched listening at the door.

There is an old proverb, which, after the fashion of proverbs, speaks little for the charity of our nature, or the sincerity of our friends, "Listeners never hear good of themselves." And Lucy's case was no exception to the universal adage.

"Come in, Philip."

"Are you late or early up, Basil?" He tried to smile and look unconcerned, but his voice was constrained, and his eyes refused to meet his brother's.

They advanced to the centre of the room, Basil leading the way. Philip, with his clenched hands leaning on the table (on which the solitary lamp burned, rather showing how dark that vast chamber was than giving it any light), awaited his brother's will. The latter quietly adjusted the painted shade, so as to throw the full gleam upon his brother's face, and keep his own in shadow. After a little while he spoke. His voice, quivering with subdued emotion at first, became clear and distinct as he proceeded.

"I would speak to you, Philip—speak as one honourable man might to another, in whose breast he struggled to hope some germ of honour still flourished—if not as brother to brother."

"As brother to brother! Why not?" He clung to any expression that might defer, if not ward off, all reference to the theme he most dreaded.

As they stood confronting each other, the table between them, presenting so strong a physical contrast, I could not help noticing how conscious dishonour robbed a man of his truest beauty.

"Because you have—we have"—he corrected himself, unwilling even in his misery to wound his brother by an accusation which might be the result of a mutual error—"we have never been as brothers. It may be the fault was mine—it may be the fault was yours—it may be simply that the elements of our natures were so antagonistic that nothing—no sacrifice, no concession on either side—could ever make them assimilate. But it is not of the long past I wish to speak. I merely state a fact, not advance a reason."



understood you all now, and the knowledge is more  
'bitter than wholesome.' Would to God it were not  
so!"

"Why?" were all his parched lips could utter.  
He asked the question, although he knew it was  
hurrying on the dreaded end he would have  
given at that moment all his earthly hopes to  
shun.

"Why?" cried Basil, "because a hope founded  
on, and brightened by the very hope which gave it  
birth, and revealed it to me, had sprung up in my  
heart, awaking diviner music there than that with  
which Memnon ever greeted the rising sun; because,  
with it, the old, deep love with which my heart ever  
longed to turn to yours (with what encouragement  
you know best) has, at last, been trampled out—for  
ever."

"I never had your heart as a brother, so the loss  
cannot be great." There was a faint assumption of  
his old insolence of tone and manner as he spoke.  
"You can't expect me to mourn over the depriva-  
tion of a something I never enjoyed."

"I have said it was not of the distant past I was  
about to speak; but if I have wronged or slighted  
your proffered affection, you have terribly avenged  
yourself."

"You speak in riddles." His pale cheek gave  
his words the lie.

"Oh, if I could believe I did! that my meaning was unknown to you, my implied accusation untrue, it would be the sweetest faith of my life that is left to me now. If, with your hand upraised to heaven, Philip Ireton, equal son of an honourable father and a most dear mother, you dare say you cannot read my speech, I will bless you, and crave your pardon for my foul suspicions. Ah! you are silent—you cannot."

"What suspicions?"

"You dare not swear. You shrink to speak an untruth, yet you shrank not to blight a brother's happiness." He paused, and struggled to restrain the vehemence of his passion, lest it should overmaster him; then continued, in a calmer tone, "you are aware my engagement with—" he could not yet utter her name—"is broken off?"

"Lucy—Miss Graham told me something to that effect, I think."

"You *think!* with me it is no thought. I—I overheard her confession this evening in the balcony. I saw—wherefore have you done this?"

Philip was silent. The tone of anguish in the questioner's voice, as he stood before him with clasped hands, shocked him; it revealed to him, well as he had known much of it before, a still "lower deep" in the depths of the utter vileness of his conduct, and showed him the misery his vanity, his selfishness, had caused; and yet he tried to palliate his offence.

"I knew her first, and loved her longest," he urged.

"Loved her!" echoed Basil.

own head."

"Did she know of your love?"

This was an inconvenient question to answer, so Philip was silent; and his silence was mistaken for an affirmation.

"If she knew it, how could she pledge her faith to me only to recall it again?" he asked wonderingly.

"Because she was not sure of my intentions."

"Did she tell you this?"

"She did."

"And you kept your intentions concealed, knowing her love for you—till, loving you still, she engaged herself to me? Thank God, this has been revealed before it is too late! No wife shall ever rest by my side with the shadow of your love upon her. That I had known this before I allowed my heart, brain, nay, very soul itself, to become her slave! She told you this, and you can repeat the words? repeat them, knowing how they stain and blacken her truth and purity. I cannot believe it. She told me she liked, but never loved you. Seeing the terms of intimacy you were on I questioned her. She ministered to your whims, your wants, your selfishness, out of gratitude to her protectors, knowing how such service on her part pleased them, and not for any love of you."

"Then she has played us both false," exclaimed Philip indignantly.

“The game has been played in your favour, so you, at least, have no right to be the first to blame her.”

“Blame her, the ——” and he used an expression of strong contempt.

“Think you it is any happiness to me to know that she is worthless? But no! you have deceived her; have spoken falsely to me. But it is past. You have dimmed the very light of my life—like a common thief you have stolen her from me; scorn not the treasure which to gain you have sacrificed your honour. You cannot restore it to me—if you could, I would not accept it: its purity gone, to me it is worthless. I sat up for you, watched for you, waited for you, to tell you this, to say we are henceforth strangers. You are my brother, false as you are, I dare not shed your blood.”

I stood a silent spectator to the scene. With all my knowledge of Basil, till this uncontrolled outburst of passion, I never before realized what a marvellous power of self-repression he must have exercised even from his childhood. He had borne slights, petty insults (so very hard to bear), without complaint or attempted retaliation, with a gentleness almost amounting to a weakness, which used to excite my wonder, sometimes also my unspoken indignation. But now, in the presence of this last great injury and its author, he seemed to have burst through his self-erected barrier, and to let the fierce torrent of his indignation rush out unimpeded, to overwhelm his rival in its impetuous flow.

Something like this seemed surging through Philip's mind also: for he stood confounded, gazing on his accuser with an expression in which surprise

the evil is not of my doing. She sought me, followed me, courted my attentions : that you must have seen long since. Flattered, lured by the witchery of her fascinations, I thought I loved her ; but this evening—hear me, Basil—this very evening, when, standing in the balcony, she told me she had freed herself from the fetters her resentment at my coldness and her hatred of Hardress O'Hara had forged and enthralled her with, I only felt how unworthy she was of a true heart, and how much I despised her for her desertion and faithlessness to you."

What must have been Lucy's feelings as she <sup>was</sup> crouched listening at the door ?

"With all his intellect, accomplishments, talents, grace, noble bearing, and manly beauty, Philip Iretton is but a poor poltroon after all," exclaimed Basil, with a gesture of contempt.

"Poltroon ?"

"Ay, a pitiable one. You are brave enough to commit a wrong, and when your treachery is found out, not only want the manhood to acknowledge it, but would transfer the blame to another, and that other a woman, whom you confess loved you, no matter how you lied when you said you loved her and asked her to be your wife."

"Basil, beware ! did any other man dare to speak as you have spoken, I would have struck him to the earth. Nor would your stalwart champion there, whom

you have so kindly brought, I presume, to witness my supposed defeat, have prevented it. Defeat! You thought you had won her from me—who won in the end? But as I know *now* I never truly cared for her, you may take her. Marry Lucy Graham? No! I'm not so mad as to risk my uncle's favour for the unprized love of a penniless adventuress."

His brother's unrelenting contempt had roused his angry opposition and pride, killing whatever seeds of penitence remorse might have engendered in his heart. He brought it upon himself, but when did the knowledge of our having sinned make the inevitable punishment less difficult to bear?

"And for this man's love she gave up mine!" exclaimed Basil, heedless of his brother's sarcastic speech.

"My heart has forsworn allegiance to this fickle queen. She's yours again," with an insolent laugh.

"Shame!" exclaimed Basil.

He paused abruptly, for there, standing by her promised husband's side, was Lucy Graham. With a robe of some delicate white material thrown carelessly round her shoulders, her loosened hair falling in thick masses down below her very waist; with scorn on her lips and in her flashing eye, she stood silently regarding her traducer, who, if angry looks had power to slay, would have fallen at her feet dead. Basil turned away, unwilling, in his great charity, to witness her humiliation.

This sudden apparition startled and confounded Philip. Signally as he had recoiled beneath his brother's bitter words, it seemed all as nothing to his shrinking in the presence of the beautiful fury,

voice, while her lips curled with ineffable scorn. "So! the high, the mighty, the magnificent, the irresistible Mr. Philip Ireton condescends to traduce a defenceless girl, condescends to basely lie. He knows his arts have left her unsupported, where she might have turned for strength, so dares to wrong her honour. O brave! most brave! I sought your love? I threw myself in your way? Your heart—*your heart*—has forsworn allegiance to its fickle queen. So, traitor to all honourable actions, you would discrown her in all good men's esteem. Your love!" she repeated in an accent of withering scorn, and with a bitter laugh; "your love! when did you ever love anything but that thing most unworthy of all love—yourself? When consider anyone's feelings, when weighed against the inordinate self-love of your miserable nature?"

"Has Miss Graham been at the play to-night, and studied the part of Alicia?" he said, with faint arrogance, yet not daring to raise his eyes to her.

"No! she remained at home, no longer any home, to see a comedy—"

"A farce, you mean," he sneered.

"Perhaps so, as you are its hero—acted out to this, its final scene;" still looking at him, without a waver in the eye, a tremour in the clear, low voice.

"Comes there any more of it? 'Tis a very excellent piece of work, Madam Lady! Would 'twere done!" quoted Philip, in quick retort.

"The sooner the better for both of us. And when it is ended, and the actors gone, take this knowledge with you, that in our last interview I told you of my hate, and showed you to yourself, as you never before have seen yourself, in your true colours." She made a motion as if to go.

"Your conversion is somewhat sudden, too sudden, some might say, to be genuine," he said to her, trying, helplessly enough, to brave it out.

"My knowledge of you, my conviction as to the truth of that knowledge, may date from the hour we first met," she returned.

"Was it to tell me this you sat up so late?" he asked, with a slight laugh.

She passed by his words and taunting manner.

"Madness!" she cried remorsefully, "to know this, to have so perfect a knowledge of you, and yet to listen to your treacherous vows. You make it your boast I loved you; you won me from my allegiance to a truer, better, nobler nature than you can ever boast of—not you alone—but pride and hatred to him," pointing to me, "lured me with charms, in which there was no witchery, on to that course, which for good or ill, in its final results I am content to abide by. And now you say you will renounce *me*. It is *I*, sir, who renounce *you*, and, in doing so, tell you this, were all your affected indifference, the contumely, the scorn you would fain heap on me, were placed in one mass, it would be as a feather in



casting it contemptuously from him, "or since our parting in the balcony this very night?"

"I will keep this as a *souvenir*," she said with a strange calmness, as she picked up the broken flower-stem, as I had done before. "You ask me since when? Since standing there at that door this night, I heard you lie away a woman's proper reserve, and so assail her character."

"Miss Graham forgets—" began Philip, faltering in spite of himself.

"She does indeed forget herself, in stooping to recriminate with one she despises. For this knowledge I must thank you." She turned to me, bowing with haughty indifference.

"By Jove! I'm in for it now!" I thought, but contented myself with merely saying, "I don't understand you. Thank me—for what?" instead of betraying my fears.

"For your tirade this morning, which urged me to a course from which I should otherwise have shrank," she returned disdainfully.

"And of which you now reap the fruits, for slighting a tirade (as you are pleased to call it) uttered in truest kindness," I replied. "If such an end as this (and believe me, I regret it) was to come, Miss Graham may congratulate herself on having taken the initiative."

"You mistake, sir; the fruits are yet to come," she said, with a meaning smile on her handsome lips and a fateful gleam in her eye. "You have sown the wind, beware how you reap the whirlwind."

Philip and I were alone. There was a long silence between us, which I was too indignant and he too deeply wounded in his self-love to break; at last he said, "Basil will some day thank me for this."

"In what way?" I demanded coldly.

"For saving—" The words were scarcely uttered when a noise as of a body falling heavily in the room overhead—Basil's study—smote upon our startled ears. With a terrible fear at my heart, I darted forward, upwards, clearing the stairs with two bounds, and rushed to his door. It was locked on the inside. I called to him, but received no answer. I called again—still no reply. Nothing but a low faint moan telling of some dire disaster. By this time the household were collecting, having started from their sleep by my cries. Some one went for a bar or a hatchet, to break through the door. Unable, in my wild anxiety, to bear the suspense of delay, I threw myself against it, hoping to force it in; it resisted my efforts. Again I tried, but tried in vain. Collecting my whole strength, I dashed myself against it. It yielded with a loud crash, and I was precipitated into the middle of the room, half-stunned by the violence of the fall. A sight met my eyes which speedily recalled me to myself. Basil was lying on the floor. Oh! the cold dread that struck upon my heart turning the current of its blood to ice. We raised him—for the

wrath.

“Not you,” I exclaimed savagely, “must keep watch by the side of his pillow!”

God forgive me! I could have slain him where he stood! Committing Basil to the Doctor’s care, the next moment I was speeding in search of additional aid.

He had ruptured a blood-vessel.

It was discovered in the morning that Lucy Graham had left the house. A note was found on her dressing-table, addressed to Dr. Ireton. It merely thanked her host for his great kindness, mentioned her broken engagement, referred him to Mr. Philip Ireton for all explanations, and gave some simple directions in reference to her luggage. But not for some time did Dr. Ireton know of the true motive which took Lucy Graham so mysteriously away. Philip would tell nothing, and Basil was too weak to be questioned.

It was long before the latter recovered from the first effects of the severe shock his constitution had sustained. It was considered advisable for him to give up all study for the present, and reside in a warmer climate. So he and I set out for Italy.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE OLD CROSS IN THE COLISEUM.

AWAY upon thy classic waters, discrowned king of ancient seas, O Mediterranean! Thy bright waves flashing round our gallant prow, as it flashed of old round the victorious galleys and goodly triremes.

Morn flooding the palpitating air with sparkling light; noon robing all heaven above, "and ocean below," in an azure garment more royal than ever was worn by king or kaiser; evening with its gorgeous sunsets glowing with orange and purple, flaming with scarlet and gold colours of such brilliancy, Turner himself would hesitate to transfer like tints to his canvas. Night with its queenly moon ruling the starry heavens. Another morn more radiant, a noon more intense, an eve more exquisite, a night more "soft and balmy." Again, another morn, and we stand upon thy haunted shores, O Italy!

In other words, being confined for the above space of time in a small, ill-kept, unsavoury vessel, amid noise, dirt, and confusion—men gesticulating and vociferating as if devil-possessed, and showing their proficiency in the English language by obscene

again when we get there—again till we get in—and fight till we get out again. Surrounded by an oil-and-garlic-loving crowd, we fight our way into a carriage. In execrable Italian, I order the obsequious Jehu where to take us; reach our hotel, and after a noisy contest with our charioteer (no longer obsequious), we thank Heaven it is all over at last.

Beneath the mild influences of southern skies, amid new scenes of old interest, new faces, new excitements, Basil's health gradually improved, and with his health his spirits. As the blood began to flow more vigorously through his veins, and his lungs to play with revived energy, his shaken nerves were restrung. And so he struggled with the evil spirit of an unworthy sorrow, and finally, cast it out, being all the stronger for the contest.

We were at Rome. One evening, Basil having over-fatigued himself during the day, throwing my cloak over him, and leaving him to rest on the sofa in our hotel, I strolled out, without any fixed purpose or destination, and found myself beside the ruins of the Coliseum. I entered this stupendous relic of a mighty generation. I perceived two ladies and a gentleman, attended by some one who appeared to be a guide, coming towards me. As they drew near, I recognized the ladies at once in the clear moonlight, though I had not seen them for more than three years, and then was in great suffering.

The elder lady, still in mourning, gracious looking as of old; the younger, with her violet eyes and gentle smile, still more beautiful than before; so changed, and yet so much the same. Yes, it was Lady Augusta Trevor, and her daughter, Violet. I saw that Miss Trevor recognized me with a pleased surprise in her eye and smile, though her mother did not seem to remember me. I bowed; but my big, foolish heart, labouring like a pumping-machine, "bereft me of all speech."

I was passing on, when Miss Trevor, touching her mother's arm, whispered something in her ear. Lady Augusta came towards me, extending her hand with winning frankness.

"Mr. O'Hara, I believe. This is a pleasant surprise."

"A most delightful one for me, believe me, Lady Trevor. I have long wished for an opportunity to thank you for a life preserved."

"It makes me very happy to think that I have done some good service; and, thinking that I may have been instrumental in saving your life, have prayed it may have been preserved for noble uses. My daughter recognized you at once. I assure you we have often spoken of our first meeting."

Miss Trevor came, and placing her gentle hand in mine, said unaffectedly, "I am so pleased to see you." Then turning to her mother, "You will say I am a true prophetess for the future. I always said we should meet Mr. O'Hara again."

"I must introduce you to one of our greatest friends, a sort of cousin—" She hesitated and glanced at him with a questioning look; he smiled,

taches, appearance, and dress, appeared unmistakably foreign. He was about middle height, slightly, but well formed. My bow was as cold as his was full of *hauteur*; and something like jealousy knocked at my heart. Could it be possible that he could live in the presence of Violet and not love her?

Lady Trevor had been leaning on his arm, but relinquished it on coming forward to address me. She resumed it; and we strolled round the ruins side by side. Gradually, I fell back with Violet; and somehow or other, we found ourselves standing alone by the huge Cross in the centre of the amphitheatre. I stood there gazing on her in silence, and drinking in delicious draughts of love. As she paused beside me with downcast eyes, how very fair, how altogether pure and beautiful she appeared, clothed in moonlight as with a garment. The Coliseum, dedicated of old to savage purposes, seemed transformed to a solemn temple, with heaven for its dome, consecrated to the divinity of Eros, and she its presiding priestess.

Lady Trevor, still leaning on Mr. Esdale, joined us. We left the Coliseum together, and walked slowly homewards through the quiet streets. On arriving at her hotel, which was also Esdale's, she apologized for not asking me in, owing to the lateness of the hour, and expressed her great regret we had not met sooner, as they were leaving Rome the

next morning for Spain. Mr. Esdale was going to Naples. That was one ray of comfort shining through the darkness of my sorrow at parting with Miss Trevor. They hoped to be in London about the 20th of May, and begged if I happened to be in town I would call. Violet wrote the address with a pencil and handed it to me. I held the little hand that gave it me, and longed, yet feared, to press it to my lips. The last "good night" was spoken, and I returned to my hotel to dream of Violet Trevor.

After our prolonged pilgrimage in the beautiful Italy, we turned our steps homewards, and reached Paris on the 1st of April, 18—.

We determined to remain in the "gay city" until within a few days of the time Lady Trevor expected to arrive in London. I had told Basil of our unexpected meeting at Rome, and he looked forward to seeing Violet with an interest only inferior to my own. Being a complete novice to the fascinations of the French capital, like a novice unguardedly I entered the charmed circle, in whose circumference a hundred smaller circles lie, each having its own centre of temptations. Twenty times I was on the verge of losing my head to twenty different pairs of black eyes, not like the soft glory of Italian orbs, but bright, saucy, and sparkling with all sorts of pretty wickednesses. But my heart proved stronger than my head; and the vision of Violet standing in the pure moonlight by the old cross in the Coliseum, said to the waves of unworthy passion, "Peace, be still; and there was a great calm."



out alone. The 18th of May had arrived, and we intended leaving Paris the next morning.

Twelve o'clock chimed from Notre Dame, and from a hundred other towers clanged the solemn hour. I was surprised at his non-appearance, for after an opera, throbbing with glorious music and worthily interpreted, he never waited for the ballet, unwilling to have his first impressions disturbed. One—and still no Basil. I was becoming seriously uneasy, but tried to hope he had gone to sup with some old friend unexpectedly encountered. Two—ah! this unknown friend and he are chatting long. Three—not yet come—a thousand wild improbabilities rendered probable by anxiety—a thousand unreasoning fears, seeming sane by the very conviction that gave them their madness—rushed through my brain; yet still I waited and watched. I blamed myself bitterly for being so selfish as not to accompany him to the opera. Four—no! I could endure this silent, inactive suspense no longer. I would go and seek him,—yet where to turn my steps?

Fears and dark surmises had gathered round my heart and brain—fears and surmises I never would have dreamt of on my own account. There is an excitement in personal danger that sustains us till its hour be past; but fears for the safety of another

dear as our own life is truly a terrible thing. Descending the stairs, I aroused the sleeping porter by roughly shaking him.

"*Qui vive?*" he exclaimed, jumping up and throwing himself into a position as if about to fire. He was an old soldier, and his dreams had been of the sentinel's guard, the watchfires, and the tented plain.

"*Qui vive? qui va là?*"

The sound of my voice restored him. He begged a million pardons.

"*Ce n'est pas nécessaire, mon ami,*" making an effort to recall my defunct French. All I *knew* of the language learned at school I had long *forgotten*. "*Vous m'avez demandé ce que vous n'auriez jamais daigné demander à un ennemi,*" said I, with laboured desperation.

The old man bowed and stroked his grey moustache, highly pleased with the compliment. He was about to say something elaborate, when a loud ringing at the *porte cochère* rang a knell to his eloquence.

"Why, Hardress, have *you* been a night-wanderer?" said Basil, entering as the gates were opened.

"As you see, old boy." I did not distress him by saying how anxiously I had awaited his coming, or what fears I had suffered on his account. "How did you like the opera?"

"Magnificent! Ah! they know how to do these things in Paris!" We entered our rooms. "I'm horribly thirsty," he said; "my lips are quite parched." He poured out a tumblerful from a bottle that stood on the table and drank it off

remember we leave by ten. Then, no! for merry England. This is the 18th," I said meaningly; "don't forget that."

"It is more than probable I shall remain here a day or two longer. However, I will catch you up in London. Let me see. This is the 18th; you will see me on the 27th at the furthest. Good night, or morning."

This announcement filled me with amazement. Noting the effect it had on me, he said affectionately,—

"My dear Hardress, my honour and interest—I mean the interest of sympathy—are engaged in an undertaking which I honestly confess ninety-nine out of any given hundred would account folly, and as you might be one of the formidable ninety and nine I fear to tell you what it is, lest your influence might lead me to repent a Quixotic resolution. You will know everything when we meet in London."

"And, of course, when my knowledge can avail nothing for good or evil. I hope, in your romantic generosity, you are not going to be made a dupe." I said warningly.

"No! to be once a dupe is never to be deceived again," he returned.

I think he wilfully limited my meaning to escape further questioning. This was the first time during our wanderings he had ever alluded to his broken

engagement. I was glad to hear him refer to it with a smile, even although there was a touch of sadness in it.

“There is no young lady in *this* case, except a *very* young one indeed. Once more good night, old Mentor. We meet in London.”

“All right!” I said, with a strong misgiving that all was wrong. “However, I’ll hunt you up before I start.”

Having shut out the staring light—for morning was looking out of eastern skies, to see how the old world had fared in her absence—I threw myself upon my bed wearied and dissatisfied. I wondered what freak was this which caused him so suddenly to alter his plans, and meditated the propriety of my remaining till the mystery was solved. But no! I could not abandon the cherished hope of seeing sweet Violet as soon as possible. Lady Trevor might only remain a day or two in London, and then pass on to her country seat in the north. By delaying I might miss them altogether. If Basil failed to meet me on the 27th, I would return to Paris. So resolving, with the name of Violet hovering round my lips, I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XII.

HILDRED DALMAIN.

I WAS aroused by a loud knocking at my door. I sprang out of bed, fearing to be too late for the train. I inquired whether Mr. Ireton was up.

“Monsieur Ireton, he had the honour of informing monsieur, was up; had gone out two, three hours ago. Monsieur had done him the honour of committing a note to his care, which he had the supreme happiness of delivering,” said the waiter, with infinite bows. I took it anxiously. It ran thus:—

“DEAR MENTOR,—‘Discretion is the better part of valour.’ I feared your influence, so wisely beat a retreat. We meet in London on the appointed day, the 27th, when I will open the very heart of my mystery to your approving (?) gaze. *Au revoir*. May favourable gales be yours, and—Violet.

“BASIL.”

On arriving in London, I called at Lady Trevor’s address. She had not arrived, but was expected daily; so I called daily till the 26th, when the servant informed me a letter had come from her Ladyship, stating that “owing to the alarming illness of an uncle, with whom she was travelling, it would

be impossible for her Ladyship to leave Madrid for some time."

Violet had told me of this invalid uncle when at Rome, though I forgot to mention the circumstance at the time.

That my disappointment was severe all lovers will truly feel; and when had heart of lover so sweet a resting-place as mine. Those who have never loved could never sympathize: those who have—what use of more?

The 27th had come. I sat in the hotel all day, awaiting my friend's arrival, feeling sure he would come. A waiter appeared, and announced the approach of a gentleman and lady, by which inversion of the usual form I was made aware the aforesaid lady was only "a little one." They wished to see me. "Show them up." Treading upon the heels of my order, in walked Master Basil, leading by the hand a young girl.

She was apparently about thirteen, small for that age, and very slight. I merely speak as to my first impression—it turned out she was nearly two years older than I had surmised. Her hair, a dull auburn, lay in heavy curls on her spare shoulders; her eyes large, with an expression of weary sadness, the result of much suffering; a dark shade lying underneath either orb bespoke long privation, if not absolute delicacy; her lips were rather full, but perfectly colourless; her pale cheeks thin and hollow. She was dressed in deep mourning, that sad token of sorrow and bereavement.

Our first warm greetings interchanged, Basil led her tenderly towards me.

“My dearest friend, Margaret O'Hara. I need not ask you to love him, Hildred, for my sake; for, when you know him, you will do so for his own,” said Basil gently.

“Yes,” she said quietly, having first looked at me attentively, “I think I shall like him. His eyes resemble yours, only they are sterner in their expression.” This was uttered as coolly as if Basil and I were lay figures, or she was comparing the relative merits of two portraits.

I took her long, thin, bony fingers in mine—their roughness told of many a weary task—and spoke a few kind words to her. Her large, sad eyes—her mourning robes—had won an interest in my heart, pleading for her better than any words could do.

“Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, our old friend, has undertaken the charge of my *protégée* for the present. Hearing accidentally she was in London, and knowing her address, I wrote to her, and received her acquiescent reply just now in the hall. She leaves for Dublin in a few days, so Hildred will have sufficient time for rest.”

“I will not leave you,” replied the child firmly.

I could not choose but laugh at her guardian's puzzled look, although I felt two bachelors, on the morning side of twenty still, travelling in charge of a young girl about the world, would in these prosaic days present a rather remarkable phenomena. They

managed these things better "in the good old days of yore," when a fair lady would mount and ride behind her gallant cavalier, "*sans peur et sans reproche*," and thought nothing of it beyond the pleasure of so doing. But the grand old chivalrous courtesy to woman, the knowledge of which alone justified her confidence, has died out, save in a few royal natures, and the moral world is all the worse for its departure.

Basil attempted to explain the utter impossibility of her remaining always with him, but becoming hopelessly entangled in the meshes of his argument, and rendered powerless by the simple question, "Why?" I quietly advised him to leave the matter in the hands of Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, an idea which never happened to strike him, and which he adopted with a sigh as of intense relief.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald was to place her at school in Dublin, Basil defraying the necessary expenses, until her father, Sir John Dalmain, wished to claim her. He thought there was little probability of that. I know not what plan he had at that time laid out for her future, or if he had any; but this I do know, he devoutly prayed she might never be placed under her father's guardianship again: and well for her, well for them both, if his earnest petition had been answered.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, with a woman's tact and delicacy, reconciled Hildred to the separation. Basil would see her to-morrow, see her frequently; and then the happy rides and walks they would have together! As he spake, Hildred began to look upon school as a little Paradise, and, probably, so it would prove, when judged by the darkness of her past life.



...  
DUBIN, although requesting that she should not to  
make known to his family his unadvised undertaking,  
did not *then* let her into his full confidence. She  
merely thought Hildred had been inconsiderately com-  
mitted to his care by Sir John, as he was going to  
Dublin, where, without any selection of establish-  
ments, her father wished her to be placed at school,  
and that Basil was only too glad to find any friend  
sufficiently obliging as to take an inconvenient bur-  
den off his hands.

She had heard of Sir John Dalmain, and the evil  
report had not belied his true character. She had  
heard of the death of Lady Dalmain, but Basil soft-  
ened the miserable details, out of consideration to  
her daughter, and glozed over Sir John's character,  
still for that daughter's sake. When the truth was  
made known to her, in her first enthusiasm she would  
have adopted Hildred then and there, for she was  
childless herself; but her new protector would not  
hear of giving up all claim to the orphan, remem-  
bering his promise to her dying mother. Again, it  
would have been better had he done so—better for  
himself and for Hildred; but the very thought ap-  
peared to his sensitive nature as a cowardly shrinking  
from a path of duty which had been so manifestly  
placed before him. If so, a sadder path of duty  
was never trodden to its end or with more tragical  
results.

When Basil placed a sum of money in Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's hands, to defray the expenses incidental to Hildred's travelling, she roundly demanded, "Was the sum drawn from his own private funds or those of Sir John?" Basil's silence afforded a sufficient reply. Then she placed a little heap of gold on the table, saying, "You can repay me some other time," accompanied with many ignominious and highly invidious remarks on the consumptive state of young gentlemen's pockets when returning home from foreign travel.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald was as winsome and sunny a little woman as ever made the eye gladden, the heart dance, or the pulse quicken to the music of sweet laughter. She never had a sorrow in her happy life save one, and that was when she lost her husband. Now, although she cried a good deal at the time, and went into the deepest of possible mourning, and told every one how hopelessly miserable she was, and what's more, really believed what she said; yet the un-gleams of her bright, happy disposition soon burst through the clouds of her first sorrow, scattering and dispersing them for ever.

She had been married by her aunt (an uncompromising old lady of strong conservative principles), she herself being an orphan since babyhood,—when scarcely sixteen, to a wealthy old man who might have been her grandfather. This "old man" was a noble gentleman, tender, unexact, and supremely thoughtful; ever remembering her childish years, and still more child-like nature, and treating both with all tenderness and gentle consideration; appreciating the great sacrifice she had made in

SON OF HIS VEST VESTMENT. DURING HIS ILLNESS SHE repaid his trust and tenderness with most unwearied attention, and an affection child-like in its character; how could it rise to anything beyond? He had now been dead three years, she had with all her wealth of gold, of youth, of good looks, made no second choice; but it was not to be supposed such an unusual state of affairs could continue for ever.


Her late husband had been a peculiar friend of Dr. Ireton's; through this our friendship commenced and continued. We looked upon each other (Basil included) in a sort of pleasant, cousinly light; she was too sensible to render our intimacy dangerous, too fascinating to make it anything but excessively charming. When the bright little butterfly, redolent with sweet scents and brilliant with the sunlight of happiness, flitted away with Hildred, Basil spake as follows:—

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BASIL'S ADVENTURE IN PARIS.

“ ON leaving the theatre, tempted by the utter beauty of the night I found myself wandering along the banks of the Seine. I came to one of its many bridges, and stood watching the reflected stars trembling in its turbid waters; wondering, thinking what strange scenes those quiet stars had looked upon since first they glassed themselves on that river which flows through the heart of the great city. Standing there I became conscious of a presence by my side, and turning perceived a young girl a few paces from me; she was looking wistfully in my face with a mingled expression of timidity and hope. I had not heard her approach, and wondered what could have brought her there at that solitary hour alone. Not another living soul was visible; not a sound heard save the low monotonous plashing of the waters eddying among the arches, and a subdued sussuration like the low breathings of the sleeping city. Seeing my eyes were upon her, after some little hesitation she drew nearer, and in a low, pleading voice demanded charity. It was pitiful to see one so young, looking so lorn and

she had been out since sunset looking for assistance, but had hesitated through fear of repulse to ask an alms. She had never begged before ; she had seen me leaving the opera, and as I slowly gathered from her, urged by an impulse she could neither control nor define, had followed me. Her mother was sick, and enfeebled by want ; she did not know the mission she was on, the cause of her long absence ; but they were starving, and the poor child burst into tears. Although poorly clad, her bearing, manner, voice and accent were all out of keeping with her manifest poverty. I asked if her father were living, and if so could he do nothing towards their support ? He was living, but—and there she stopped—I saw she was unwilling to proceed, and hesitated to inquire into a mystery which might only pain her to reveal, and which a daughter's heart would feel ought to remain left unspoken. My interest deepened as I contemplated her, and glimpses of a higher station were caught by some look, some intonation, some gesture, arguing a culture rare even in our own rank. I told her I would accompany her home, for I gleaned from some words she let fall her mother's illness was of a more fatal nature than she supposed. She was surprised and pleased at my proposition, but offered some faint objections ; faint, because the earnest eyes, with all their depths of sadness, pleaded pathetically against the arguments raised by the



lips: 'The way was long, the *quartier* poor, the trouble great,' and so on, yet all the while those large earnest eyes with their silent eloquence were imploring me to come.

"A *fiacre* appeared, I hailed it; obtaining the child's address, I ordered the driver to set us down at the indicated place. Having arrived at our destination, he drew up; we descended: the street appeared narrow, and it needed no light to tell one it was foul and poverty-stricken. Ordering the man to wait, I followed my guide into a dark entry. We then emerged into a court from which the pavement had been, for the most part torn, (perhaps, in one of those violent eruptions of Liberty which may be said to have become a speciality of Paris,) and passing through an open doorway, ascended interminable flights of stairs. My conductress gave me her hand as I stumbled upwards in the dark; custom had made the passage easy to her. It seems strange to me now I had no fears—no misgivings: but such a simple confidence had I in the pure truthfulness of the child, doubt never for a moment crossed my mind. At last we came to a pause. I saw a light glimmering overhead through the numerous chinks of a closed door, against whose sill rested a ladder. The child, whispering me to remain where I was, ran nimbly up the steps, and disappeared into the room; she quickly returned holding a lamp above her head to guide me up the rickety approach. The room was small and scantily furnished: a curtainless bed, an old chair, a stool, a trunk studded with brass nails open and empty, a broken stove lying in one corner, a chafing-dish in another; propped

of the dim and smoky lamp.

“On the miserable bed lay Hildred’s mother.

“She raised her head with difficulty to meet her daughter’s kiss, then sank back as if exhausted by the effort. As the flickering light fell on her pallid face I could see (it was still hidden from her daughter’s eyes) death imprinted on every sharpened lineament. She asked in a faint voice, broken by intermittent gaspings for breath, where her daughter had been and what had kept her so long away? ‘Oh, how I wearied for you, my child; I feared the end might come, and I never see my Hildred again on earth.’

“Her eyes rested upon me; she regarded me for a moment with a vague sort of wonder, the next she appeared to have forgotten my presence.

“‘You will be better soon, dear mother,’ wept Hildred, as she bent over the pillow to hide her tears.

“‘Better! ah! yes—soon!’ and a smile of strange sweetness was on her lips as she gazed hopefully heavenward. I understood the solemn import of the words; to the child they merely spoke of present life. ‘My lips are parched—a little water.’

“I had procured some wine and other necessaries on our way. Pouring out some of the former into a stemless glass I handed it to Hildred; she held the

cup to her mother's lips; she merely tasted it—but it revived her a little.

“‘Have you seen—’ she hesitated.

“‘No, mother, but I called at my—his lodgings, and left a message saying how ill you were. He will surely come. I would not have remained away so long—only—only—you were hungry and I could not return home penniless.’ And she hung her head as if ashamed of the confession, and uncertain how it would be received.

“‘Begging,’ said the dying woman, while a faint blush overspread her hollow cheeks. ‘My darling, my darling, has it come to this?’

“‘What could I do, dear mother? we were both so hungry,—we could not starve. Look here, dear mother, here is what will restore you to strength; I will be able to work for you, to support you; we will leave this dreadful city, and live in the country among flowers, and sunshine, and contented people.’ And she showed her delightedly the piece of money I had given her at the bridge.

“When the suffering mother saw the gold, she gazed on her daughter with such a look of horror I shall never forget till my dying day. Clutching her convulsively, dragging herself up by the grasp, she looked searchingly into the face of the now terrified child. What mad suspicion took possession of her I know not; but it was not till I had placed myself by her side, and, taking her worn hand in mine, spoke long and earnestly to her, she quite overcame her agitation. I tried to induce her to eat something, but she refused; she had no wish for anything only a little wine to moisten her dry lips.



and broken sentences her sad life-history. It was a dark tale of sorrow and suffering; of wrongs patiently endured; of riches, affluence, competence, poverty, distress, starvation. For she, who lay there on her miserable pallet, dying, with no one save an utter stranger and a child by her side, was the only daughter of the late proud Duke of Meresdale. She had eloped with Sir John Dalmain, her father's deadliest enemy, before her school-days were well over, and had been disinherited, renounced for ever by the Duke. The latter was a widower, and he married, soon after his daughter's disastrous flight, a lady of noble birth, by whom he had one son. He died leaving his vast property to this son, consequently my *protégée* is niece to the present Duke of Meresdale.

"A step was on the stair; it mounted the ladder; the dim eye of the injured wife brightened. The love of former days seemed to revive with their memory now so soon to be quenched for ever, but it could not be for long; and when the beauty and tenderness of the expression had passed away, the old manifestation of anxiety resumed in its place.

"I guessed the step was her husband's. Imagination, borrowing its ideal from her tragic history, had pictured a savage-looking ruffian such as one reads of—but, the door being passed, a tall, slight, gentle-

manlike-looking man, with handsome, aristocratic features, furrowed by reckless dissipation rather than age, presented himself hurriedly. As he entered I rose and withdrew to the corner where lay the broken stove. He did not perceive me in the uncertain light. He breathed hard, as if he had been pursued and had just escaped from some great danger. He approached his wife with marked indifference.

"'I heard you were ill, by accident. Bah! you will soon be better.'

"'By accident? I sent Hildred,' answered a weak voice.

"'I have long left my former lodgings. A friend of mine stops at my late place, and had the d——d impudent curiosity to listen to the message which she delivered and left before my late landlady had time to answer. Don't send again for me, even if you do chance to know where I hang out; it's not always convenient, and certainly never prudent.'

"What was his wife's illness to him so long as he was safe?

"'No,' she replied feebly; 'I will never send for you again.'

"There was a prophetic meaning in every tone of the sentence, irrespective altogether of the significant words.

"He took the lamp from the old bureau where I had replaced it, and approaching the bed held it so as the light fell on the pallid features of the invalid. Something akin to remorse seemed to strike him, for his face became pale as he gazed.

"'I did not know you were really so unwell,' he said, replacing the lamp in its former position.

unworthiness, lest all her beloved mother had suffered from his neglect and evil-doing; the galling sense of wrong had become enwarped in the very web of her existence.

“‘I am glad you have come. I wished to speak to you about Hildred before I die.’

“The voice was very weak, and her articulation becoming so indistinct it was with difficulty any word was understood.

“‘Die! O mother, mother, you will not leave me!’ cried the child in a passionate burst of weeping, as her mother’s danger, for the first time, presented itself visibly to her mind.

“Both mother and daughter had forgotten my presence. Unwilling to be the secret witness of an interview at which I had no authority to be present, I stepped out of the shadow in which I had remained since Sir John Dalmain’s entrance. He started in evident terror. ‘That man,’ thought I, as I remarked his white, scared look, ‘stands in danger of the law.’ On perceiving I was not a Frenchman he recovered his self-possession, and advanced to meet me with the easy politeness of one long accustomed to mix with ‘good society.’ The bland smile did not deceive me. He was chagrined, humiliated, naturally enough, that a stranger, speaking his native language should witness his degradation and the misery inflicted by it on his hapless wife and child.

For was it not the result of his crimes, his insane love of gambling, his—what you will ?

“ ‘ The doctor, I presume ? ’ ”

“ I related briefly as I could how I had met his daughter and my subsequent conduct. Hot and indignant thoughts, burning to shape themselves into words, stirred at my heart and struggled upwards to my lips for utterance—but I forced them down. Of what service would my reproaches have been then ? If the awful scene in which he stood, overshadowed as it was by the gloom of the Dread Presence, failed to speak to his conscience, of what profit could any comment of mine be, of what avail ?

“ He looked at me keenly, eyed me from head to foot, calculating, possibly, on my monetary value as an acquaintance. He evidently considered me soft, and imagined I would prove an easy dupe were it worth while to experimentalize on me. He muttered some common-place expressions of thanks, began a sort of self-justification ; told how vilely the world had used him, throwing the blame of all his misfortunes on society's broad shoulders ; spoke of the unnatural cruelty of the late Duke, and again referred to his gratitude to me. I cut him short, for I was disgusted with his hypocrisy. Gratitude to *me* for so slight a service which his neglect had alone rendered necessary ; gratitude to me for a common act of common charity and none to the wife who had forsaken all, father, home, friends for his sake, and from whom he must have received so many offices of love ; who, lying there, miserably perishing from want, and disease such as want ever fosters, and all through him, was ready to forgive him every-

She essayed to place her arm round her daughter's neck as the child now lay sobbing on her breast, but she was too feeble, so I gently took her emaciated hand in mine—how icy cold it was!—and laid it in the desired position. Motioning her husband to her other side she muttered a few broken sentences, very feebly, relative to their daughter's unpromising future.

“ ‘What a deuced bore the child is a girl,’ he said impatiently.

“He had scarcely uttered the unfeeling words when he started and the cold perspiration stood like rain-drops on his forehead. The attitude of careless attention he had assumed in listening to his wife's final wishes was changed to one of abject dread. I looked around for the object which had caused this ghastly fear, and perceived two men standing in the room and a third in the doorway. One of them advanced, and, placing his hand on Sir John's collar, said, with a smile of satisfaction, ‘Ah! good! my faith, monseieur is caught at length. I arrest you, Sir John Dalmain, for forgery, at the suit of Monsieur the Count de Boisville.’

“The arrest was made swiftly and noiselessly. The captive saw at once escape was impossible, so yielded without a struggle.

“The capture acted like an electric shock upon the occupant of the bed. She raised herself with a

vigorous effort, as if her exhausted energies had been suddenly renewed by some miraculous power and a new vitality given as the dreadful truth swept across her brain.

“‘At last, at last! O God, have mercy on my desolate child!’

“Her very voice seemed restored in power, though its tone was sharp and unnatural. The terrified child flung her arms round her mother's neck; there was no tear, no burst of agony now; terror had usurped every other feeling.

“‘There must be some mistake,’ stammered Sir John at last.

“‘Good! So much the better for monsieur, if monsieur could prove it. Till monsieur is in that happy position it is altogether necessary for monsieur to accompany us.’

“‘Gentlemen,’ whispered the unhappy wife, ‘I am dying. He is my husband. I will not detain you long.’ She had sunk back again exhausted, weaker for the last exertion.

“The dim lamp was now burning more dimly as if the sustaining oil were nearly exhausted. It seemed uncertain whether it or the light of life would go soonest out on the dark night. The men drew back respectfully, muttering confused apologies for their intrusion. They were stern men, made so, doubtlessly, by their harsh calling; but they were awed and subdued by the unexpected presence of a suffering it lay not in their province to inflict. Sir John gave a rapid glance at me, then round the room. Escape was impossible with those three men now ranged in order at the doorway, so he turned to where his

curis.

“ ‘Who will protect my child ?’

“I had bent down my head and strove to catch her words.

“ ‘Mother! mother! don’t leave me,’ cried Hildred, as a film slowly gathered over the vision of the departing mother; for a moment the soul recalled by that beseeching cry was arrested in its flight. The lamp was burning very dimly now.

“ ‘I will be her protector.’ I bent low and whispered softly in her ear. I took her hand in mine. An almost imperceptible pressure told me I was understood. Something like a smile was on her parted lips. Hush! That horrible sound in the throat; the death-rattle. I know not how it is; there is no resemblance between them, but that sure sign of a vanquished life ever associates itself in my mind with the first dull thud of the fresh earth falling on the coffin-lid. It grew fainter and fainter,—and the lamp went out. When I looked up, even in the dimness, I could see Sir John and his captors were gone. The child was lying on the breast of the dead mother, and daylight miserably struggling through the narrow window.

“He, Sir John, had been accused of forgery by the Count de Boisville. In a few days after I met him at liberty, ten thousand francs having been paid to the Count. The affair was hushed up. De Boisville is

a noted gambler and *roué*, with a reputation unclean as Sir John's own. I entered on my guardianship at once, and was the sole mourner at Lady Dalmain's funeral. I had no second interview with Sir John Dalmain. So ends my adventure in Paris."

We had both letters from Ireland; Basil's from Dr. Ireton, mentioning, in measured terms of indignation, his sister-in-law's (Mrs. Frank Ireton, of Dhu Hall) private marriage with Mr. O'Stoun; mine from Hector O'Grady, telling, among other things, of the marriage of Lucy Graham with Lord Rathmore, a nobleman rich in money, land, and very rich in years, being somewhere near eighty, or thereabouts. I knew Lord Rathmore well by reputation; he was an eccentric old gentleman, with a peculiar temper, and original ideas on the subject of domestic happiness. He had been married before, but his wife had died childless, and Tom Dorian, of Dorian Hall, was his heir-presumptive, and in all probability would continue so: Tom Dorian, the best fellow in existence, one whom I liked better than any man living, always excepting Basil Ireton. The latter felt deeply the unaccountable privacy of his mother's second marriage.



## CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. FITZ-GERALD.

MRS. FITZ-GERALD took Hildred with her to Dublin. She did not place the child (strange I could not divest myself yet of the idea she was a mere child, owing, I presume, to her fragile, delicate appearance) immediately at school, according to her guardian's suggestion; but, with true kindness, brought her to her own cheery home, till she should become reconciled to the novelty of her new position, and her first sorrow softened by time. Possessing genuine kindness of heart, a quick, impulsive nature, "all sunshine and tears, like an April day," she conceived at once an ardent affection for the desolate girl thus singularly committed to her charge. And the poor, motherless girl soon learned to smile, as probably she had never smiled before; for, albeit she alluded ever reservedly to her past experiences, the few reminiscences she did indulge in, all told of privations and suffering. She spake of her dead mother with a veneration almost amounting to idolatry, and with an appreciation of character remarkable in one so young. Yet, strange as it must appear, the perfect lineaments of that mother's

face were not painted in such vivid colours upon the canvas of her memory, as the semblance of her expression, the recollection of her love, her sufferings, her death. The impression these had limned was indelible.

Any picture of a saintly sorrow endured by woman, any exquisite specimen of the painter's art which told of trials patiently borne and nobly overcome, no matter how diversified were the distinctive features the limner's cunning had given to the ideal sufferer whose grief he portrayed—when any such painting met her view she would gaze on it with tears trembling in her eloquent eyes, and softly whisper, "How like my mother."

I, or rather we, remained in London for some months. I in the hope of seeing the Trevors, Basil from unwillingness to leave me. At last we heard the date of Lady Augusta's return was more and more uncertain, as her uncle's illness had assumed a more serious character.

Our first visit was to the bright little widow, who spoke in rapturous terms of her *protégée*—of her aptitude, her docility, her cheerful willingness to oblige. "Should we like to see her?" Of course we should. Mrs. Fitz-Gerald requested me to ring the bell. In answer to the summons a servant appeared, who having received her message retired, and presently Hildred entered. Perceiving, as she supposed, strangers in the room, she paused at the door, with downcast eyes. There was nothing of bashfulness or timidity in her manner. She rather seemed as one who awaited commands which she knew would be gently given, and pleasing to execute.

grown with the hue of returning autumn, the fair lips to be dyed with the scarlet of the pomegranate flower, the dull auburn of the long thick hair, already giving token of that golden lustre which, in a short period, was to make it look so rich in its wondrous luxuriance.

"Come here, my love!" Hildred came quietly towards the fair speaker, still with downcast eyes.

"These are friends, here, anxious to claim your welcome."

Her lips parted in sudden terror. Could it be her father? She raised her eyes, as if to dare and brave the worst, when, seeing Basil, she uttered an exclamation of joy, bounded forward, and threw herself into his arms. A tear glistened in the fair widow's eyes at this childlike evidence of trust and gratitude, to be succeeded by a silvery peal of laughter, as Basil, taken quite aback by this unexpected manifestation of feeling, stood looking down on Hildred with a half-puzzled, half-pleased air, perfectly at a loss how to act, or how the *rôle* of guardian was to be preserved towards so demonstrative a ward.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald motioned me aside.

"When did you arrive in Dublin?" she inquired.

"This morning; some two hours since."

"Then you have not seen Dr. Ireton?"

"No; *you* are the first I have waited upon. How can you wrong me, by supposing I could call on

any one before *you*?" The seeming little being looked so bright and fascinating one could hardly help trying to be sentimental; but she was heartlessly unmoved by my attempted gallantry.

"Fiddle-de-dee! Don't talk nonsense, and try to look sentimental, sir. I assure you neither folly becomes you. Besides, you know, sir, I never permit such things from those who can both talk and look sensible; to those that unhappily can't I listen and endure." And she gave a pretty little shudder of self-commiseration. "It is very hard a *petite* individual like myself can't speak civilly to a man without his making a complete goose of himself, under the delusion he's making one of me. Sentiment does not become you at all, sir; you are much too big and clumsy."

"Complimentary!" I laughed.

"Besides," she continued, in her bright way, "if I permitted such atrocities—well, the term *is* strong—I should lose the charming immunity I enjoy, in living, doing, and saying exactly how and what I please. I go in for Plato; not that I know anything about the gentleman, except that he lived ever so many hundred years ago, and said, or wrote, or did something very clever. Have you seen Lady Montague? But *do* tell me, have you seen Dr. Ireton? I forgot; you answered me 'no' before, or something tantamount to a denial, tried to look fascinating and signally failed. Do you intend remaining long in town? Do you go to an hotel, or do you purpose staying with your respected uncle?"

"No—no—yes—no—no."

"Laconic and polite. How am I to know to

"My eyes are fixed on our stay in Dublin," I replied.

"You remain some time? I'm glad of it. Oh, don't flatter yourself; it's not on your account, but I am most anxious to have Basil's advice regarding his *protégée*, and to understand something about her future prospects. You can see she will be very beautiful."

I looked at Hildred more attentively, but could discover no cause for Mrs. Fitzgerald's enthusiasm. She might turn out rather pretty, or perhaps, more properly speaking, rather handsome, but nothing more. I asked her, did she suppose Basil a more competent adviser us to the general bringing up and educational courses of young ladies than her humble servant?

"Perhaps not; but he's much pleasanter to chat with confidentially."

"Polite and laconic!" quoting her own words.

"Besides he's too honest to attempt flattery—too sensible to commit himself to sentimentalism," she continued pleasantly.

"You are too severe on my heroics. But really, when you place such temptation in a bewildered fellow's way, it is too bad to ridicule his failure so unmercifully."

She merely laughed lightly in reply.

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“Do you know, Hardress, I have irrevocably offended your amiable uncle. Come now, be silent, sir! and don’t attempt and fail in some stupid insipidity as to the perfect impossibility of Mrs. Fitz-Gerald’s offending any one. It’s a fact. I’ve tried very hard to be penitent, but considering how I came to offend, can’t get up an amount of contrition sufficient to make me cry ‘peccavi,’ or prevent me running a similar risk again, under similar provocation, even if forgiven my first offence.”

“What was the subject of dispute?” I inquired, trying hard to picture the little widow assuming an air of pretty penitence before my unsympathetic guardian.

“I was charitably spending the other evening with them,” she began, “when some allusion was made to Miss Graham’s broken engagement and her marriage with Lord Rathmore. Although the scandal in reference to the former had ceased to excite any interest in the little world we move in, so many, and extraordinary reports had gone abroad, I was anxious to ascertain the exact truth. The Doctor’s version, exculpating Philip, was *not* satisfactory. So, by dint of pertinacity, cross-questioning—I would have made a charming lawyer—don’t smile idiotically, and try to look saucy, sir. I mean charming in the ingenuity I should have displayed in eliciting the truth from an unwilling witness—and by directing a skilful battery of well-directed questions against his wife, knitting, needles and all, I managed to arrive at a true understanding of the shameful affair. Philip was altogether to blame?”

She read my answer in my looks as plainly as my

gentleman (though a little muddled as to facts), tried to throw the whole blame on Lucy, after the manner of men; but I stood up as champion for my sex. I felt the Doctor was arguing against his convictions, and told him so very plainly: he, feeling the justice of my accusation, and being secretly irritated that his favourite should have laid himself open to be charged with such unworthiness, lost his temper in spite of himself. His wife's convictions (if the dear old lady possesses such perquisites), were all in accordance with mine, though she expressed no opinion. She has a most exemplary reliance on her husband's judgment—quite a model wife. Well, the Doctor was displeased by my pertinacity. (you know, he holds it as a matter of faith, a woman should have no opinion of her own, in spite of his general courtesy, which is the result rather, I think, of a sublime knowledge of what is due to himself than what is owing to her) and, as I said before, lost his temper, seeing I would neither be put down nor lose mine. At last he said 'he could not sufficiently admire or regret the fine old civilization, when woman was only happy in her own home, ministering to the wants of her household, or plying the distaff.' I rose up, and, with a profound curtsy, said I should be most happy to go home at once, if he would honour me with his escort. So, putting on

my bonnet, I took his arm, and ordering my carriage, which was in waiting, to follow, led him off in triumph, chattering away during our walk, and assuring him he was a most delightful, agreeable, and altogether charming companion, although he never spoke a word, but looked quite cross and ogreish. This onslaught on his dignity so subdued him I could have led him captive anywhere from sheer astonishment. Arrived at home, I compelled him to come in; I ordered a champagne and oyster supper. Just fancy little me, presiding at a champagne supper with a half-savage, half-bewildered old gentleman, who looked as if he could have eaten me as well as the oysters. Men, in common with other ferocious animals, grow tamer after being fed, an observation I would recommend to the notice of all wives. When the Doctor grew a little amiable I sent him home in the carriage."

"If you punish offences so pleasantly, you will only bribe people to offend."

"Oh pray don't imagine I would have punished *you* in a similar manner. I adapt my correction to the nature and circumstances of the transgressor. Poor Mrs. Ireton, when she saw my temerity in taking possession of her husband, looked petrified; she dropped her knitting (her most expressive sign of astonishment), and, as it has been confidently affirmed, never resumed it till his reappearance. And by that time a kitten, mischievous as myself, had pulled out all the needles, and left the worsted in inextricable confusion. After *that* catastrophe, I never ventured to call again."

She had spoken in a low tone lest Basil should over-



MRS. FITZ-GERALD asked me had I heard of Philip lately. "No. I never corresponded with him, and Dr. Ireton never mentioned him in his letters to me when I was abroad."

"Which satisfactorily proves to my little mind his uncle blames him more than he cares to acknowledge, even to himself," returned she. Trifling for a while with a flower she held in her hand, she continued, "I was surprised to hear he was staying at Rathmore Castle."

"Who?"

"Your cousin."

"Philip!" I exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes. Lord Rathmore met him accidentally on some boating excursion, and finding Lady Rathmore and he were old acquaintances, invited him to the Castle; rather an unusual proceeding on the part of his quaint lordship, who, I hear, is not generally given to hospitality," she explained.

"How could Philip meet her?" said I, in wonderment, "or she receive him as her guest after their last interview in Merrion Square." I spoke unguardedly, in my surprise raising my voice above the low tone in which our conversation had been carried on. I saw Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's admonitory "Hush!" was too late, and that Basil had overheard me.

"Is Philip the guest of Lord Rathmore?" he asked. "I am surprised."

"I have ceased to be surprised at anything my friends do," she returned lightly, "or, rather, charitably have learnt to extend to them the immunity I claim for myself. Surprise was a dreadful bore. Every one seemed so bent on perpetually doing the most unaccountable things in the most unaccountable manner, my mind became a perfect chaos of astonishment; so I gave it up. I now try to think that every one means to do right; only some either miss their intentions, or choose an extraordinary way of fulfilling them."

"Tom Dorian, Lord Rathmore's nephew, has been summoned by his Lordship to the Castle. He has written me to meet him at M—— and accompany him. I have declined for obvious reasons."

"Well," said Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, "I suppose it would hardly be pleasant for Lady Rathmore to see you just yet; but when Philip accepts I really cannot see any good reason for you to decline. I have heard a good deal of this Mr. Dorian. He is a favourite of yours. I know his mother Lady Montague, and his sisters, Olive and Vermeil, intimately, but have never met your friend."

"No; he loves the country, its freedom and sports, too well to visit Dublin much. I hope you will know him some day. He is as honest and true-hearted—"

"Your favourites are always perfection," she laughingly interrupted me.

"Of course when *you* crown the list. He's the best fellow in the world."

"Always excepting," she said, shaking her finger archly.

num. A tear for a moment trembled in her bright eyes, trembled, but did not fall.

"What does Basil intend doing?" she inquired.

"Resuming, I fancy, his studies, while I pursue—"

"Young love among the violets," sang Mrs. Fitzgerald in a clear, ringing voice as she tripped across the room to where Basil and Hildred sat.

Basil having thanked our hostess warmly for her unremitting kindness towards his ward, and expressed his gratified surprise at the visible improvement in her health, took his departure, I going with him. As soon as we had left the house, and the door closed upon us, he said, "You will go?"

"Go! Where?"

"To Rathmore Castle," he rejoined emphatically.

"Impossible, my dear boy. What excuse could I form for trespassing on—on Lord Rathmore's hospitality?"

"Tom's pressing invitation will be sufficient. You will go?"

"What would Lady Rathmore think?"

"Go."

"For what purpose?" I demanded irresolutely, for the solemnity of his manner impressed me.

"Go," was his sole reply.

That evening I set off to meet Tom Dorian at the Royal Hotel, M——.

## CHAPTER XV.

### AT RATHMORE CASTLE.

I DESPATCHED a note to Dhu Hall, ordering Larry M'Teague, my valet, to meet me at M——. The following afternoon I reached the hotel and found Tom Dorian standing on the doorsteps awaiting my arrival. He was a tall, stalwart, good-looking fellow with a manly face and engaging smile, a profusion of very light brown curly hair, honest blue eyes, and a beard, thick and tawny as a lion's mane, which almost obviated the necessity of neckties or waistcoats.

He was unfeignedly glad to see me and pronounced me "a brick" on the spot for coming, and frankly confessing he dreaded the dulness of Rathmore Castle, and rather contemplated meeting his uncle (of whom he knew but little) and his handsome wife (whom he knew not at all) with a feeling akin to awe.

Tom, bent on paying a visit of duty, considered he was justly entitled to make the journey one of pleasure; so mapping out his route he had sent forward a man empowered to beat up relays of horses at each stopping-place, as he intended using his own comfortable travelling-carriage.

moorlands, broken and interspersed with rocky knolls of whinstone, bright in the sunbeams with purple heather and patches of silver-green lichen and the daffodil gorse, but now looming dark and sombre in the uncertain light. Away, onward and upward, till we pierce the very centre of the mountains, and look upon the wild beauty of the glorious west, the land of the Formonians. The moon is but some two days on the wane and the heavens are thick with amber stars. Now our road lies between lofty mountains, piled up in a thousand fantastic forms, their tapering summits standing out sharp and well defined against the dark azure of the midnight sky. There is one to our right, cone-shaped and imperial, rearing its head alone in conscious majesty: its summit is crowned with star-beams, its rugged feet partially bathed in the waveless waters of a sleeping lake or standing on a moory waste. One side lies in dim shadow. It seems clothed with an impenetrable forest: it is only the branchy heath and waving fern in the deceptive gloom. The other gleams like a vast silvery expanse, veined with some dark ore and riven by sparkling cascades frozen ere they fall, for the moonlight is full upon that side and it is seamed with marble, silver sand, and glittering spar. We come to a miserable village, and stopping at a low door over which is inscribed the legend "Refreshment for man and bastes," we rouse the sleeping landlord, and

make him rekindle the peat fire, for the waning night is cold. We resolve to move onward, as neither the inn nor its beds look very inviting. After a steaming tumbler of poteen and a tranquil cigar, we order fresh horses to be harnessed, and determine to push on to the next town some miles distant.

I enjoy this night-driving through wild scenery, rich moonlight, and suggestive shadows. It has a spell of romance in it. I dream, wide awake, about unearthly German legends; and people the dark mountains and rocky dells, the torrents and lakes with their fantastic forms. Now the tardy morning begins its struggle with night, which had conquered but to succumb and flee like an evil spirit before the knight's enchanted shield. The heavy mists begin to climb slowly and sullenly up the mountain sides, like labourers going unwillingly to work; and now a solitary beam appears on a rocky height, timid and uncertain how its visit may be received; now another, and another, and another, each deeper in rich colouring than the last, till the towering pinnacle is ablaze with ineffable glory. The lower mists have caught the splendour and glow with crimson fire. Anon the sun bursts forth right royally, scattering his gold like a monarch on his coronation day. Sublime in their desolate grandeur those mountains stood beneath the solemn stars; sublime still they stand robed in their saffron and purple draperies and crowned with light. We enter a gloomy pass where the shadows of night still brood and darken the bitter lakes which are scattered at no distant intervals; how black and cheerless and treacherous they appear! We reach a small village, not very prosperous-looking to be

the obstinate determination of an obtrusive pig and some inquisitive chickens to bear us company. It is no use driving them out, as the door of our *salon* pertinaciously refuses to shut, and is moreover minus a lock, latch, and handle. Fresh horses are awaiting us. Once more we speed us on our "winding way."

A long barren stretch of headland and peeps of the "broad Atlantic;" mountains again surrounding us, and cascades dashing headlong into rocky glens. Deep ravines full of wild beauty, threaded with silver streams; a lonesome pass; a wide rock-interrupted stretch of partially cultivated land (each patch a small oasis in a desert of boulders), a rapid drive in full view of a rugged coast, and our four "gallant steeds," a bay, a grey, a black, a white, now, from toil and travel-stain, almost indistinguishable in colour, enter gallantly the village of Rathmore. I dismount at the comfortable-looking inn, and Tom departs alone for the castle some mile and a half further on, having been strictly charged not to reveal my whereabouts. Shouldering my double-barrelled Manton, I set out the next morning in quest of a seal, several of which I had remarked the evening before lying on the lower rocks or raising their innocent faces out of the water. I should premise Rathmore village was situated in a basin, formed by a rocky headland on the west and enclosed by mountains on the other sides. It was about a quarter of a mile from

the sea. Having reconnoitered the coast, I had commissioned a boat to meet me at a certain indicated point; so, in order to supple my limbs and enjoy a vigorous walk, I strode up the steep headland. Standing on its jagged crest, hundreds of feet above the restless deep, I enjoyed a splendid view of the glorious Atlantic. The morning was so bright, the air so bracing, the waves so sparkling, the mountains so grand, I sang aloud in the very fulness of exuberant vitality.

Returning some hours later unsuccessful, I perceived a little way before me a figure lying on the green sward, so velvety and starred with sea-pinks. I recognized Philip at once. He heard my approach, and, looking up, appeared infinitely more surprised than pleased at the rencontre.

"What brought you here?" he demanded, our first cold greetings over. We had not met for more than a year.

"What brought *you* here?" I rejoined, in true Irish fashion. "Is it half so strange that I should visit Rathmore village as that you should be a guest at Rathmore Castle?"

"You heard that?" he replied, slightly colouring. "The most natural thing in the world. I rescued Lord and Lady Rathmore from a position of some danger, and he evinces his gratitude by boring me to death with the terrible monotony of his dull castle," he continued hurriedly, as if apologizing for his presence in the place. "The old gentleman could at one time manage a boat capitally; but on this particular day the breeze was pretty stiff, and he began playing tricks with the sails for the amiable



got his Lordship and wife on board, and let his stupid boatmen swim ashore. Guess my surprise to find who the rescued lady was. His Lordship, discovering I was an old acquaintance of his wife's, and hearing I had put up at the inn, sent for my traps, and insisted on my staying at the castle."

There was an anxiety in his manner which struck me as peculiar. It well-nigh tended to raise the very suspicion against him which he so evidently desired to guard against—I mean, a doubt as to the purity of his intentions in coming to the neighbourhood at all.

"Has Lady Rathmore forgiven you?"

"Lady Rathmore can afford to forgive Philip Ireton," he replied, in a tone of offended pride. "I was not so much to blame in that affair as you suppose."

"So you explained on a former occasion," I returned drily.

He looked up at me doubtfully. He had not risen from his grassy couch.

"I marvel much, if the titled lady can afford to forgive, that the injured woman can consent to forget?" I said, wishing to try him.

"We live in modern days, when hearts are changed with the facility of hands in a country-dance, and our last partner as soon forgotten. Revenge is obsolete."

"Do you see much of her?" I inquired.

“Who? Lady Rathmore? No. Seldom before dinner. I think she avoids me. That is,” correcting himself, “she enacts the *grande dame*, and keeps in retirement till the afternoon. Shall you wait on her?”

“Certainly not. We can have no wish to see each other.”

I think he seemed pleased with this.

“Do you remain any time?” he asked.

“I simply await Tom’s leisure, which I presume depends on his Lordship. Do you lie there, or come my way?”

“This sun is glorious—it reminds one of Italy—and the murmur of the sea deliciously soothing.”

I left him indolently lying in the full blaze of the burning day. He had never mentioned his brother’s name, nor did I obtrude it on his observation. They were severed, so let them dwell apart.

Lord Rathmore was a little, withered, peery old nobleman of some eighty-two or three winters—not unlike what the disciples of Mr. Darwin might suppose to be the last stage of development before monkeyhood ascends into manhood.

His hair was long and white, he rejoiced in white bushy eyebrows and frosty cheeks, a small blue nose, thin, ashen-hued lips, and was altogether very cold and wintry-looking. He had been long given to eccentric habits. Although, in a certain peculiar way, proud of the beauty of his young wife, the observance of long years was stronger than his love, or pride, or admiration, or whatever may have been the name or nature of the sentiment that dimly existed beneath the rime of his fourscore years. He treated her with

its true solution. Men marry for fifty reasons, but not one of the fifty could he ever apply to his own particular case. For love? No; he knew well enough love had nothing to do with it. For her beauty? No; he had pictures as beautiful which cost him nothing, not even an emotion. For money? No; she was dowerless. For ambition? No; his rank soared above hers. For worldly consideration? No; he lived apart from it, and it affected him not in the solitary life he had chosen for himself. For pride? No; proudly as she might grace his table, his ball-room, or carriage, he never entertained so that her rich beauty might be recognized; and he formed most ingenious excuses for not allowing her the free use of the carriage except only at rare intervals, and chiefly on particularly damp and disagreeable days. Not that he strove to hide his beautiful treasure from the eyes of the admiring world as a miser hides his gold, lest it should be stolen from him and his idol be lost. Nor was it, as yet, from an old man's jealousy of her sweetness and youth, contrasting the brightness of her spring-time with his hoary winter. The desire to resolve the problem grew up in his brain, and took undisputed possession of a mind always ill-balanced and erratic, till it became a sort of undeveloped madness. Dwelling on this, he would sit for hours crouching

in the depths of a capacious arm-chair, his knees drawn up to his chin, munching with his toothless gums, peering at her through his small ferrety eyes, never speaking or withdrawing his regards from her, till she began to fear him as some strange, uncanny being. Fight against the feeling as she would, in his presence it always overmastered and subdued her. At first she had affected not to notice his strange demeanour, but she saw he penetrated her artifice and secretly enjoyed it. She then tried self-assertion, but that signally failed, for what had she to assert, meeting with no tangible opposition. He agreed, with a chuckle and apparent alacrity, with everything she said, every plan she formed, every wish she expressed; but somehow or other all turned out ineffectual; every wish was quietly frustrated, every plan fell helplessly to the ground. Another delightful peculiarity of his lordship was his deafness on certain occasions. No utterance, no matter how distinct, no amount of shouting could make him hear when it came upon him. At these times he was imperturbably, helplessly deaf, though on other occasions his audition was sufficiently acute, especially for everything not intended to meet his ears.

Of all the world, there was only one person of whom he stood in secret dread, and that was Mrs. O'Dowds, a buxom widow of fifty, his housekeeper. She had held that position for more than twenty years, assuming it soon after her young husband's death in a madhouse. Always connecting the widow with the sad fate of her husband and its surroundings, he had gradually grown into the belief Mrs. O'Dowds had formerly been a matron in a lunatic

the friendly dame retired discomfited. She mistook the housekeeper's kindness for pity, and her pride rebelled against all sympathy and the blameful sorrow for her unnatural marriage sympathy seemed to imply. So she stood apart, closing her heart against all womanly feelings; all gentle influences which might have won her from her self-contempt, and in some way smoothed the rugged path she had elected to tread, blindly revenging on herself the wrong Philip Ireton had done her.

Day and night she meditated how to escape from the thrall her husband had placed on her will. No! she must drag the heavy chain on through life till she lay down weary at her journey's end, or till he—

When rescued by Philip from the sinking boat, and when, her first sickening terror past, she saw to whom she owed her safety, she felt she would rather have sunk for ever beneath the deep waters than live to be indebted to him for her life. As he stood up, in the full splendour of his manly attributes, looking so strong, so tall, so handsome (and these all enhanced by the very force of contrast), beside her old and shrivelled husband, looking down upon him with an expression in which amusement and sarcasm were blended, she felt she hated him for the very extrinsic

properties which had first won her girlish admiration, next her woman's heart.

She saw he despised her through the choice she had made. She felt ashamed of her husband, ashamed of herself, ashamed that the man who so grossly deceived her had the power of making her feel such shame. How the feeling humiliated her—made her wealth, position, title, all for which she had sold herself (bartering her life and its peace for a baffled revenge), seem worthless as the dust the beggar treads beneath his feet on the barren highway.

But when she heard him invited to take up his residence at the Castle, without any further reference to herself, save the assurance it would afford her great pleasure to receive one of her old acquaintances, to be attentive to one who had saved her own life and that of her *dear* husband—when all this was said for her, as she stood silently by, trying to look cold and indifferent, while the devils of false shame, wounded pride, passionate resentment, were tugging at her heart-strings—and when she saw something of the old passion lighting his dark eyes as reference was made to herself, his handsome mouth curling with scorn as reference was made to her husband—she felt she could have slain him where he stood; yet, calm and motionless, she made no sign.

“Hell has no fury like a woman scorned,” so sings the poet in the tragedy of “Zarah; or, the Mourning Bride.” It may be so, but she emulates heaven itself in her divine power of forgiveness. “Unstable as water” is her wrath in the presence of a repentant lover suing for pardon at her feet.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A WILD DRIVE.

LORD Rathmore is seated in his chair, in his favourite attitude. His Lordship had passed a restless and feverish night, talking incoherently to his young wife, who kept watch by his bedside in obedience to his wish. His red night-cap, peery eyes, and little blue nose were all that appeared above the silken coverlet. He had watched her covertly, but, contrary to his usual custom, withdrew his regards each time her eye sought his, and feigned to be asleep. She enters the morning-room, dressed and ready to go out. He looks at her with a sly smile, but utters no syllable. Carriage-wheels are heard outside on the white pebbles; and horses are pulled up before the hall-door.

"What's that, eh?" demands his Lordship so abruptly that Lady Rathmore starts, and feels her courage giving way; for she had entered the room determined that no plea preferred by her husband should prevent her this time from following her inclinations.

"What's that?"

"I am going out for a drive," speaking with deliberation. But his Lordship was suddenly deaf. She

knew how futile would be her attempts to make him hear, so she began calmly to button her gloves. The servant entered to announce the carriage was at the door.

"Eh, visitors? tell them I'm not at home, and shut the door," cried his Lordship with such a startling accession of irascibility that the servant fled. Taking her gold torquoise-studded pencil-case, she wrote her intentions, and handed the paper to his Lordship. This was a mode of procedure he was unaccustomed to, consequently it baffled him. However, he would not yield easily; so, holding the obnoxious paper in every possible form and in every possible light; turning it in every possible way and in every possible direction, he at last consented to acknowledge himself acquainted with its contents.

"Going far, my queen?" His deafness had altogether left him.

"Perhaps to the village and along the coast," she replied indifferently.

"Ah!" he returned, with a chuckle. "Does Apollo, Adonis, Ganymede, Endymion, Paris, and all the rest of those heathen reprobates, go with you?"

She raised her eyebrows slightly, in a questioning manner.

He felt she had the better of him, and was proportionately annoyed.

"That Ireton, I mean; your old friend."

She bent on her husband a look of supreme indifference, and said coldly, "I am going alone."

"Alone, my queen! your loving hubby will accompany you, to cheer, amuse, please, delight you, my Gulnare."



“My queen must go to the village, eh? I’ll—I’ll show my beautiful Aphrodite to the admiring world of Rathmore. He! he! he!”

She would fain have gone alone. She longed to escape from the presence of her husband, from every one, and be whirled along the wild sea-board, with its free winds and tempestuous waters. She wanted solitude, without the monotony of calm. She tried to bring his own arts to bear against him. The day was damp, the wind cold, he was ailing; but he beat her with his own weapons. He would rather suffer martyrdom than disappoint his beautiful wife by ungallantly declining to bear her company. She would willingly have given up the drive, could she have found any plausible excuse for so doing, but she could create none. Her position with regard to her husband was peculiar; she was entirely dependent on his bounty, not only during his life, but also after his death.

In her haste to marry—a haste partly engendered by her wrath against Philip—she had met and taken captive Lord Rathmore, whom she had casually encountered, and who seemed struck with her beauty. She thought—a common mistake with women—that the loveliness which had the power to win would alone have the power to hold; she had married him

without settlements. When his Lordship proposed, her sister's husband had written to Lord Rathmore's lawyer on the subject, and received as reply, he had laid the matter before his Lordship; and there it ended. He called at the castle and addressed Lord Rathmore personally on the prudence of making some provision for his widow, but the latter had been seized with his chronic deafness. "Touch the lady's fortune!" he exclaimed. "No, not a penny of it; not a penny; not a penny!" He knew perfectly well she hadn't a penny to touch, and, hobbling out of the room, entered his carriage which was in waiting, and drove rapidly away, leaving the vanquished pleader in possession of the field. Lucy's friends were afraid to broach the subject again, lest they should frighten his Lordship; so they solaced themselves with the idea she would be "an old man's darling," that she could manage him as she chose, &c.; and Lucy's future was left at the caprice or mercy of her husband.

Before setting out, Lord Rathmore had some secret communication with his coachman, who, in common with all the domestics (with the honourable exception of Mrs. O'Dowds), had an undisguised dread of the diminutive, irascible old gentleman, who looked so like a fairy changeling.


They drove off together in an open carriage; she silent, reserved, self-contained, yet swelling with an undefined sense of wrong and oppression, a feeling that pervaded her whole existence; all the more bitter, perhaps, because she could not resolve to herself what the actual injury was, or in what its tyranny lay. She felt she was watched, thwarted, and baffled by

any open and avowed tyranny could do. Now that her first keen resentment against Philip was past—now, in the uneventful life she had been condemned to lead since her marriage, when there was nothing to distract her thoughts from her former wrongs and her self-made fate—now that she had seen Philip, dwelt beneath the same roof with him again, saw in his unspoken contempt, how thoroughly he understood and appreciated the motives of her marriage, how thoroughly he understood and appreciated that the means she had taken to prove her indifference to and humble him had recoiled upon herself, and stung her, scorpion-like, to the very soul;—she longed to be freed from this ill-assorted union, that brought her nothing to countervail her self-contempt, and only flung her at the very man's feet she would have given her very life to have down before her own, that she might spurn him. Not down before her as a lover pleading his passion—no thought of that had as yet entered her mind; and though she fain would have cast from her the galling marriage chain; no idea of effecting her freedom by any unlawful means, as yet, rose darkly on her passion-distempered brain.

They entered the village, and drove through its dirtiest streets, to the manifest discomfort of pigs, ducks, chickens, and squalid, ill-clad children. They turned down another street, more miserable

than the last, full of all evil sights and smells. She shuddered with disgust. Her husband pointed out each revolting object, as something he hoped she would in time use her influence to have ameliorated; something which lay in the sphere of her new duties; pointed out houses to her where malignant fevers had been rife, and small-pox revelled, with such ill-disguised glee, she almost felt as if some pestilential malaria had smitten herself. He showed her one miserable cottage, with its rotten thatch, green with mosses and weeds, and its dank walls discoloured with rain. He averred an old woman dwelt there, a reputed witch, who dealt in love-potions, charms, and deadly poisons. Lady Rathmore looked with strange attention at the miserable hovel, as if wishing to impress upon her memory its exact position in the street. It may be her curiosity was excited at the sight of a spot where one with so mysterious a reputation dwelt. Leaving the village, evidently in obedience to former orders, the coachman drove his fresh, spirited horses up a wild mountain-road, scarred and rifted by autumnal torrents and the melting of winter snows. Their progress was slow, as every rut endangered the springs of the carriage, and the horses fretted and chafed under the restricting reins. Lady Rathmore reclined in silence, too proud to confess her fears, too indignant to request her husband to choose a better road. But, above all this, there was a change, or, rather a recurrence of last night's excitement in her tyrant's manner, that filled her with secret uneasiness,—nay more, with absolute dread. As they ascended the mountain-road the

hanging with smoking spray in the very face of heaven. The scene appeared to add to Lord Rathmore's previous excitement. "Faster, faster!" he shrieked, in a shrill, unearthly voice. The impatient horses, startled by the weird cry, plunged, and reared, and strove to dash forward; but, as yet, the driver's skill, backed by the difficult ascent, kept them well in hand. The summit was gained. Below them lay a steep ravine, through which a mountain-torrent raved between high iron banks; a bridge spanned it, looking, from the height which they had gained, like a narrow rope; the road before them was more steep, and rugged, and broken up than that they had just surmounted. "Faster, faster!" screamed his Lordship, starting to his feet, and compelling his terror-stricken companion to rise from her seat. With one hand he pointed to the steep descent, the foaming torrent sweltering through the fatal boulders; with the other he grasped his wife by her arm to enforce her attention. The wind had carried away his hat, and his long white hair streamed behind him; there was a fiendish light in his red eyes, and a cruel triumph on his mocking lips. He seemed rather the incarnation of some evil attribute, than anything akin to humanity. "Faster, faster!" raved the old man, as the horses, maddened by terror, and bursting from all control, plunged headlong down the steep declivity.



"This is life!" he shouted with a triumphant laugh; "this is living! Faster, faster! Ho! ho! cleaving the tempestuous winds, the waves holding their distempered revelry beside you, and maddened torrents raving below. Faster, faster!"

Lucy had sunk down again with closed eyes, crushing herself into a corner of the carriage, and forcing herself against it with all her might, as if any strength of hers could stay its rapid course. And now, piled upon her great terror, another fear arose, that her husband was mad—a maniac was standing beside her, urging her on to sure destruction. She tried to jump out of the carriage, but, like a vice, the madman grasped her arm, pinned her down to her seat, laughing, and gibbering, and shrieking, "Faster, faster!" The coachman had abandoned the reins, and flinging himself off his seat, was dashed over and over by the impetus. They are near the river-bed—twenty feet below its banks roar the wrathful waters. Destruction is sure, certain, imminent. Suddenly two shots, in quick succession, ring on the stormy air, and, with a single plunge, the horses fall pierced through the brain. Lord Rathmore is flung between the dead animals, and I bear Lucy, insensible, in my arms, and place her gently on a bank of wild thyme, having extricated her from the overturned carriage. Tom comes running up breathless; I leave Lady Rathmore to his care, and extricate his Lordship from his perilous position. He is partially stunned, not quite. There is a deep red gash on his head, he is bleeding profusely, but no bones broken. Lady Rathmore is the first to recover; her nerves have

if road-worthy, even at a snail's pace, horses to be procured, no matter what kind. Tom undertakes this part of the business. Lucy, now recovered, leans heavily on my arm as they bear Lord Rathmore past on a rude shutter.

"Is he killed?" she whispers in a low voice. There is a gleam in her eye as she asks the question.

"No, he is much shaken; but, I trust, not seriously injured." She gives a sigh of relief as I say this, and we walk on slowly in silence. She speaks after a little.

"Twice saved since my marriage—and by those who wronged and hated me most. Is it not strange!" She says this musingly, as rather communing with herself than addressing me. So I allowed the accusation against me to pass; what use to contradict it. Let the dead past be buried with its dead wrongs out of sight, for ever. She asked me how I had come so opportunely to her rescue. I explained that Tom Dorian and I had set out for a walk along the sea-board, taking our guns with us, rather from the force of habit than anything else, as we well knew the seals would seek the deep waters in such stormy weather; I had seen horses in a conveyance running away; being too distant to hope to intercept them before they plunged into the

torrent, by any other means, I had shot them down ; it was the only way to save the lives in danger. She expressed no surprise at seeing me in the neighbourhood, so, I concluded, Philip had betrayed my residing in the village for a time, notwithstanding my express wishes to the contrary. Relinquishing my arm, she walked beside her husband as he was slowly borne to the little inn. She expressed no word of thanks to me for her life preserved.

I had despatched one man to Rathmore, to have the surgeon in attendance when we arrived at the castle, and a second messenger to a town some miles distant, to summon a physician of some local celebrity. I dressed his wounds to the best of my ability, and finding it was his desire, anxiously expressed, to be taken home, ordered horses to the carriage, which Tom pronounced in travelling condition with care. Lifting his Lordship, I placed him on a seat with his head reclining on my broad chest. Having first assisted Lady Rathmore to resume her place, Tom mounted the box, and, shaking the reins loose, drove slowly homewards. I had bound up the wound on the sufferer's head with such rude skill as I possessed ; he was evidently in great pain. I asked Lady Rathmore "how it was they risked their lives on such a dangerous road, and what had terrified the horses?" She looked quickly at me, then at her husband, but made no reply. I saw the reason of her silence when I looked down, her husband was watching her closely through his half-closed eyes. Presently he appeared to fall asleep. Taking a handkerchief she spread it lightly over his blood-stained face, and



expressly shocked, the intelligence did not altogether surprise me. It was plain he was much shaken, and at his advanced age it was more than probable he would never recover the effects of the accident. There were no signs of madness about him now. The great loss of blood from the wound in his head had relieved the oppressed brain. There were no bones broken, as I said before, but serious fears entertained he had met with some internal injury; such was the opinion of both his medical advisers.

In the very face of this surmise he appeared to recover with marvellous rapidity for one so old—he seldom spoke to any one, and never by any chance alluded to their drive, but lay watching every movement of his wife with a stealthy, suspicious glance as if he feared her, and yet he could not bear her out of his sight. She attended his every want with exemplary patience and unwearying duty. I only saw her at infrequent intervals, during which she ever endeavoured to impress upon my mind that notwithstanding the symptoms of madness he had shown he was now perfectly sane. The reason of this anxiety soon betrayed itself. He had made no will since his marriage. If by any art she could flatter him into making one now in her favour, if she confessed him to be incompetent, might it not be disputed and set aside on the

grounds of his insanity? Nor do I think he was deranged at this time.

Although Lady Rathmore had, in her great terror, asked me to help her, she had never since alluded to her request or pointed out in what manner my services might be required: nor was I anxious to be entrusted with her confidence in any way. I would have declined all intervention on her behalf, if applied to, had I not felt how utterly friendless and alone she stood in the world. On the other hand, I thought if I refused to counsel or aid her in any trouble or extremity in which she might be placed, my help failing her in her strait, might she not turn to Philip for succour? would not his kindness be more fatal to her peace than the deadliest injury an open enemy could inflict? Full well I knew that Philip had never loved her worthily, and what is more dangerous to the honour of a married woman than constant association with the man she loves or has loved, when his presence throws her husband in the shade—a husband who had never won even her regard. Though in his vanity, he took every occasion to force the contrast between them upon her, I do not think he then meditated that last wrong a man can do to man; nor did he pause to consider how dangerous to the peace of both that selfish enjoyment might prove eventually which he experienced so fully in her presence. Sometimes when he looked at her unguardedly, and passion lighted up his violet eyes, the old flush of triumph would glow upon her kindling cheek. In a moment it would fade, and she became cold and impassible, almost repellent.

on the plea of his Lordship's illness, but, in reality, preferring the untrammelled liberty of my little inn.

Lady Rathmore, taking heart of grace, spoke gently to her husband of her unprotected state in the event of his leaving her a disconsolate widow, of the reasonableness and propriety of his making some provision for her future. It was not meet the wife of Lord Rathmore should be left at the mercy of his heir; but, on the very first mention of the subject, his Lordship was once more afflicted with his chronic deafness, and gave such mad wild turns to her request, her Ladyship stood aghast, wondering how he could suppose she uttered such dreadfully shocking things as his answers implied. Perhaps he objected to make his will, or rather devise another testament, because he knew her utter dependence upon him galled her;—"galling a wife a little now and then," he was known to affirm with a delighted chuckle, "is a good plan; it stimulates affection;"—perhaps he felt he had an additional hold on her services so long as she knew her future depended on her obedience to his whims.

Baffled, but not conquered, she brought all the witchery of her charms, backed with certain golden promises, to bear upon his Lordship's attorney. The man of law, with a deprecatory smile on his acute face, rubbing his hands as if they were cold and wanted warming, with a quick succession of obse-

quious bows, as suffering from repeated shocks of an invisible galvanic battery, approached the bedside where, peering at him, lay his intended victim. The old man eyes him—chuckles inwardly—but does not speak. The attorney, to open fire, talks of the weather, his Lordship's accident, of the uncertainty of life, and the absolute need of legal preparation for death. "We knew we were here to-day, and supposed we should be somewhere to-morrow. It would be rather pleasant than otherwise to depart this life in the full assurance our worldly affairs were comfortably arranged, and our widows amply provided for. That nothing was more conducive to our future happiness than knowing the laws of our country had, figuratively speaking, smiled beneficently on our last efforts. That all flesh was grass, which might be cut down without even notice to quit—"

"Cut me up, you rascally doctor? Cut me up without any notice?" shrieked the irate old man. "I'll, I'll, I'll cut you up,—take that," and seizing a basin of gruel, sent it whirling after the flying attorney, bespattering him from head to heel.

His Lordship lay back and chuckled till he brought on a fit of coughing which seemed likely to settle the question of the will for ever.

## CHAPTER XVII.

MISS PENELOPE SPOONBILL.

A WEEK passed and Lord Rathmore was still held a prisoner to his bed. He would not hear of Tom Dorian leaving him, and as so much depended on his keeping firm hold on his uncle's favour I persuaded him to gratify his wishes, and remain. Becoming wearied of the monotony of Rathmore I ran up to Dublin, promising Tom to return if his stay was to be much prolonged.

Months flew past and Hildred was placed at a boarding-school. Regular habits, strict discipline and companionship with her equals in age did not prove so advantageous to the neophyte as either of her protectors had hoped; for Mrs. Fitz-Gerald shared Basil's ward and exhibited even more than his enthusiasm in the welfare of their mutual charge. Her mother having, in all probability, in her unfriended desolation, treated her rather as a companion than as an inexperienced child, ruled her with quiet tenderness and guided her gently with the silver reins of love. Ah! happy child to be thus guided! and Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, from her own clear instincts and bright disposition, having pursued a similar method,

the performance of duties under the pressure of strict command and fear of punishment was something so novel, so little understood by our heroine, it roused all the latent pride of her nature, goading it to silent rebellion, which from its very reticence was difficult to meet and cope with.

Had it displayed itself in passionate outbursts of wordy indignation or wrathful tears it might have been subdued by tact or overcome by kindness; but she was simply passive with her teachers and haughty with her playmates: the memory of her early experience actuating her conduct in this latter respect, lest the humiliating knowledge of her past life should ever become theirs and teach them to despise her. She was sensitive in the extreme, fancying slights where none were intended; so she kept apart from her schoolmates, shrouding herself in a cold reserve. But her teachers soon found out the one talismanic word to conquer her apparent apathy and waken the beautiful (for she was beautiful now) statue into life and active endeavour. That word was "Basil."

In the hope of pleasing him she became diligent and painstaking in her several studies and tried very earnestly to conform to necessary rules. For Mrs. Fitz-Gerald she had conceived an attachment only inferior to that she evinced for Basil. To gratify her was also a strong motive stimulating her to excel. She mastered her most difficult lessons with an ease that excited the envy and admiration of her less gifted compeers. She evinced so absolute a talent for music and, as her voice developed, proved herself to be the possessor of an organ of such rare power

forming any definite plans for her future without some reference to her father, although Sir John, by letter or otherwise, had never evinced the remotest anxiety respecting his daughter's welfare. Had they wished to apply to the baronet for some knowledge of his plans in reference to her, it would have been impossible for them to have done so, being totally ignorant of his whereabouts. Basil had given Dhu Hall as an address where he might always be heard of, but Sir John Dalmain had offered no guide-mark in return. This very isolation from all her natural relatives was very sweet to Basil, and made him doubly feel the sacredness of the pledge he had given to her dying mother.

Hildred had now been some months at school, when Mrs. Fitz-Gerald received a letter from a distant relative of her late husband's, who resided in a small village in one of the northern counties of England. The writer, of whose existence the gracious widow had never been aware, Miss Penelope Spoonbill by name, stated, with much feminine circumlocution, "that adverse circumstances had gathered like clouds around the horizon of her uneventful life and threatened to shut out the circumambient rays of fortune for ever," by which it will be perceived Miss Penelope was given to figurative language if not poetry. "She trusted she was not intruding on the flood-gates of her fair relative's

benevolence if she requested the favour of a small pecuniary loan, to be repaid her in the mansions of the skies, if the present derangement of her monetary affairs prevented such a consummation in this sub-lunary valley of blighted hearts and frost-nipped hopes. Although intervening oceans and distant climes had hitherto prevented her enjoying the felicity of knowing her wealthy and fascinating relative, of whom her dear departed cousin in the flesh, but brother in the spirit, Mr. Fitz-Gerald, had spoken," &c.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald never having heard of the ornate Penelope from her late husband during the brief happy period of their married life (he never for a single day having left her, and she always having acted as his amanuensis), marvelled where the writer had heard him speak of her, or what opportunity *he* had of displaying the estimation he had so proudly evinced for her; an estimation the very memory of which made her eyes glisten with prideful affection.

Although not particularly charmed with the letter, nor forming a very exalted opinion of the writer, a relative of her husband being in distress formed a plea all powerful with the kind-hearted widow. It seemed as if an opportunity had occurred of repaying some of the trust and great tenderness she had met with in a manner which would have been most pleasing to her husband had he still lived; so the impulsive little relict of the wealthy banker immediately despatched a letter full of kindness, entreating the radiant Spoonbill to come at once, and reside with her as long as she found her (Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's) home agreeable; condoling with her on her misfor-



... some cases, she saw boxes, and some dozen brown-paper parcels, showing with what pleased alacrity she availed herself of the proffered hospitality. Mrs. Fitz-Gerald had pictured to herself a fair and somewhat faded spinster, short and plump, possessed of an infinity of eloquence, spiced with good-natured affectation. Imagine her surprise, when curiously peeping between the rails of the venetian blind, she beheld a something so contrary to her expectations descend the carriage-steps (as one wholly unaccustomed to the proceeding); she was almost dismayed. The visitor's appearance was not such as would excite an author's enthusiasm. She looked, as Larry (my valet) afterwards graphically described, "as if she was all angles and gables (gables), like an old house in a picture." She was remarkably tall, while her head and face were so diminutive as to suggest unflattering reminiscences of school-boy freaks and turnips stuck on long poles to terrify persons afflicted with feeble nerves, and entertaining unhappy prejudices in favour of ghosts. Her hair, pale, faded, and scanty, was something the colour of her complexion, which reminded one of dusty roads on summer days. Her eyes were delicate green, somewhat deeply set, with an appearance of constitutional weakness, partially derived from being destitute of the silken fringes in whose favour there is a vulgar prejudice, and the absence of eye-brows,

which are also popular. Her mouth was peculiar from its width and total absence of all appearance of lips. At the extreme point of her thin nose her heart's best blood seemed centred. Her long neck was fluted like a Corinthian column, and her bust—well, I don't believe she possessed a bust. I do not say this assuredly, but offer it as the merest conjecture founded on external evidence.

I am not certain the little widow would have written either so pressing or so unreserved an invitation to the fair Spoonbill, as to express "a hope she would consider her house her home,"—I think (albeit an impulsive little woman in general) she would rather have asked her for a longer or shorter period, and then (the visit ended) have contented herself with performing such acts of kindness as the necessities of the case demanded—fulfilling them thoroughly, consistently, and above all ungrudgingly—had not certain of her very kind friends remonstrated with her on the impropriety of a young, pretty, and, above all, wealthy widow living alone, without some prudent female companion, whose age was sufficient to qualify her for all the offices required by the most stringent sticklers for feminine propriety. A sort of petticoated dragon to guard the Hesperides of the sunny widow's wealth from the assaults of some impecunious Hercules. To sanction with her gravity her (the widow's) merriment, or protect her from unworthy construction; a feat of no easy accomplishment in this suspicious world of ours.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald long parried these onslaughts of advice. She would laughingly have fought her own battles to the end, and have come out victorious, had

so charmingly congenial, their habits so very similar—and, at last, proposed herself as this ultra-desirable companion, and became so persistent that the fair widow became alarmed lest the old lady might quarter herself on her whether she liked it or not. So when Miss Spoonbill's supplicatory letter arrived, it was hailed as a deliverance from the threatened invasion.

If it were a necessity her selected companion should be considerably older and plainer than herself (she had a sort of presentiment a Spoonbill could not, under any possible circumstances, be young), her instinct was certainly correct. Miss Penelope Spoonbill was certainly *not* young. In fact, she was considerably older than her style of dress and address warranted, and considerably thinner into the bargain. But under any circumstances, her personal appearance would have fully satisfied the most scrupulous stickler for propriety. It will be seen she possessed all the requisites necessary for a chaperon.

Being English by birth and extraction, and educated within a circle of narrow prejudices, she felt she was performing a sacrificial act in giving up poverty and the dulness of an English village, for affluence in Ireland, which she looked upon as the "*Ultima Thule*" of civilization. She considered the Irish as a sort of semi-civilized people, with a strong

predisposition in favour of whisky-punch, faction fights, dancing, and murder. That the poor herded with their pigs, the rich with their dogs in ruined castles; that Ireland was a physical and moral morass; that it was unsafe to travel the country unarmed; that the bulk of the inhabitants being of the Romish persuasion, the shooting of landlords, and cracking of Protestant crowns was their favourite occupation and amusement.

And how did the fair Spoonbill become a pensioner on the charming widow's bounty?

Brought up in the tenets of the Reformed Church, she had for many years continued an unquestioning subscriber to its formulas and doctrines.

The Rector of K——, her place of residence, was a well-meaning, unpretending Christian gentleman, who, if he did not preach sensational sermons, nor attempt to glorify his abilities by suggesting novel interpretations to world-old texts, did, what was better, an infinity of good in his own quiet, unobtrusive way. He had a firm and living faith in the inspiration of the written Word, believing it to be the oracular voice of God, whose truth admitted no question. Most blessed was he in his unadulterated faith. So unostentatious were his charities, so unpretending his benevolence, few, very few among those who even knew him best, suspected half the worthiness of that heart which throbbed so calmly beneath the capacious waistcoat of the worthy Rector.

Though long past the meridian of life, never having been lured to his destruction through an insane belief in matrimonial blessedness, he was still the

MOVING WITHIN OF HIMSELF, PINE-WALKERS, ANTIQUE gloves, lambswool socks, worked slippers embellished with suggestive patterns of doves, velvet covers to hold his manuscript, and neatly-hemmed bands. One lady, being of an energetic and practical turn, with strongly developed ideas on the rights of woman (she was a widow, and had practised on her husband), hit on the bold expedient of presenting him with a warming-pan; but even this last token of annexation failed to enlighten the darkened mind of the Rector.

Among the fair besiegers, Miss Penelope Spoonbill had unfurled her banner. Perhaps she had persuaded herself into a sort of sentiment for him, which she mistook for love; perhaps only into the desire of becoming mistress of the old-fashioned Rectory, with its quaint gables, covered in May with the sweet-scented clematis, amid whose starry blossoms peeped forth the beautiful promise of summer roses. But as her advances, if meeting with no repulse, met with no encouragement, her hopes began to flicker and wane, like the expiring flame of a rushlight; for indifference is the death of passion.

About this time a new star arose upon the benighted village—Mr. Boanerges Marlove.

He took possession of a small chapel belonging to some sectarian denomination, but which had for

many years past only been kept open at spasmodic intervals, for the congregation generally clung with affectionate reverence to their beloved pastor. They loved him for his tried friendship and true worth, his unpretending goodness, his simple faith, and the great truths he taught so simply. He had instilled into the minds of his hearers a love for their beautiful liturgy, and though they sometimes dozed during the sermon—on warm summer days, when soft winds made soothing music amid the tall elms and sombre yews in the churchyard—I don't think they felt the sin very deeply.

The Reverend Boanerges was a tall, lank man, with white, refractory hair, small red eyes, which evinced a decided admiration for his small snub nose, a capacious mouth, and complexion somewhere between chalk and Stilton cheese. Several went to hear his first sermon from sympathy with the sect to which he professedly belonged; others from curiosity. Many who took a savage delight in hearing their fellow-Christians condemned became his most zealous hearers—for a time.

The fair Spoonbill and the Reverend Boanerges met frequently in the village streets, and occasionally in the cottages of the poor—accidentally, of course, yet these happy accidents occurred so frequently they assumed an appearance very like design. It was remarked (it may have been a mere ill-natured libel) she became more assiduous in her district visiting, especially among the recusants; but that may have been to win them back to the Church, though it seemed to have a contrary effect. On the occasion of their first meeting in the street, the

solemnly that she was in a *very* sad, dangerous, and much-to-be-commiserated spiritual condition. It only failed to reduce her to immediate despair as, owing to his peculiar obliquity of vision, for some time, she was uncertain on whom or what his regards were so steadfastly placed.

When the fact gradually dawned upon her that *she* was the object of his solicitude : after one of these silently uncomfortable meetings, Miss Penelope was wont to retire to the chaste privacy of her chamber and examine her face attentively in the mirror.

Why did he gaze so earnestly, *not at* her, but with his face, at least, turned towards her? Did he fear for her health? No; she was healthy-looking as usual—not a remarkable boast by-the-bye. Her dress? No; that was as neat as ever. Did he—admire her? Oh! thought that brought a sovereign balm to her poor wounded heart, wounded so cruelly by the cold Rector's insensibility! She absolutely blushed with pleasure. She had been so used to disappointment; her shred of a heart so reduced by hope deferred, she trembled to entertain a thought that spoke of hope being realized. But could it be *only* her spiritual welfare he thought of? If he would only first take her temporal welfare under his protecting care, might not her spiritual follow? How many are like her in this? How many were won by



such training? She resolved to go and hear him preach—she went and became his worshipper.

Why did the Reverend Marlove seek every occasion to meet the delectable Spoonbill?

He had discovered she possessed a handsome little fortune at her own disposal, under the control of no father, brother, or inquisitive guardian. She was one of the lights of the village, deep in the mysteries of religious manifestations, prominent in local charities. It would be a special triumph if he could induce her to desert the standard of the Rector, and array herself under his banner. At their now frequent meetings in the cottages he had contrived to impress upon her mind many uncomfortable feelings respecting her future state.

“Not that he blamed her, oh no! but the guileful shepherd who had left the tender lambkin to pasture so long on the barren mountains;” and he gave her unequivocally to understand he had come to feed the aforesaid lambkin, and nourish it in his bosom.

Unaccustomed to this style of address, Miss Spoonbill admired it and pronounced it “sweet eloquence,” but felt a secret misgiving whether the Church, the Rector, or she herself was looked upon in the uncomplimentary light of “a barren mountain.” As before hinted, Miss Penelope elected to “sit under him,”—which expression must be received in a strictly figurative sense.

The revered Boanerges, though occasionally affected with a weakness for the ultra-elegant in composition, was nevertheless one of those hierophants who, in their love of the denunciatory and



ation to Miss Spoonbill to know that everybody else in the parish was in the same benighted condition. But when the energetic preacher proceeded to inform his hearers he had arisen, like a second Moses, to lead them out of the Egyptian darkness in which they had been involved by all former teachers, into "a land flowing with milk and honey," her courage revived, and she privately regretted the journey from the land of night was only ideal—it would have been so delightful to take such a long walk with the fascinating Boanerges.

The sermon, or rather the denunciation, being ended, the hearers were invited to indulge in private meditation upon their knees, while he wrestled for them with their roaring enemy.

Suddenly small cannonades of groans and ejaculations, mingled with a light musketry discharge of sighs, reverberated through the conventicle.

The Reverend Boanerges next inquired how each individual felt. Now, Miss Penelope Spoonbill, never having witnessed a similar proceeding, mistook the nature of the question, and replied, with a flutter of gratified vanity, "Pretty well, I thank you, sir;" and received an admonitory nudge from the elbow of a stout old lady, with a pine-apple face, evidently capable of the highest pantomimic development.

Miss Spoonbill regarded the scandalized



of the pine-apple countenance with a dim presentiment of something untoward at first, and then was inclined to look upon the spasmodic contraction of the brows, the warning glances, the pursed-up lips, and head-nodding (as if resolved to nod itself off), as indications of lunacy. Anxious to escape from such unsatisfactory neighbourhood she attempted to rise, muttering some complaint about the hardness of the floor, and the desirableness of a cushion. But when the preacher intimated that it was solely to her spiritual welfare he alluded, the Spoonbill was overwhelmed with confusion. And now his magnanimity was shown in all its greatness. He had subdued, but would not crush. With much ostentatious care he raised her from her kneeling position, and, taking both her hands between his own, pressed them with much holy unction against the centre of his greasy waistcoat.

The pine-apple lady, with the extraordinary pantomimic powers, regarded Miss Penelope Spoonbill with envy. Being very stout, wedged in between two cramping forms, and altogether in a state of great bodily discomfort, very far from conducive to tranquillity of mind, she used the utmost efforts the situation allowed, to excite a corresponding degree of commiseration in the breast of the pastor. But, alas! she was only a hardy, weather-beaten old sheep, and not a delicate, tenderly-nurtured lambkin, so her shaking of the head, rolling the eyes, her repeated endeavours to show how uncomfortable she was, only drew down upon her devoted bonnet the thunders of the Reverend Marlove's indignation.

Burning with a sense of injustice, the stout old

pared—oh! The introduction thus consummated speedily ripened into intimacy, and, at last, the lady invited the gentleman to a quiet tea,—

“Will you walk into my parlour? said the spider to the fly.”

In this case, however, the fly gave, and the spider accepted the polite invitation. A dear friend, of course, was asked to sanction the meeting, and conciliate the stern proprieties; but, being both deaf and purblind, she was not found to be particularly in the way.

Violent was the indignation which raged among the good Rector's adherents at this desertion to the enemy's camp. The delinquent was “cut dead,” and thus driven more surely along the very course they blamed her for running; whereas, a little forbearance, gentle remonstrance, and Christian charity might have won her from her folly, if anything *can* win a lady of a very *certain* age, determinately bent on matrimony, from pursuing the error of her ways.


Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, having formed very exalted ideas of all her late husband's relatives, was somewhat disappointed when the veritable Penelope appeared. Being an embodied sunbeam, and looking upon everything in a hopeful way, she imagined

a world of amiability lay concealed beneath her visitor's unpromising exterior, and was contented to wait till it should reveal itself. Being an enthusiastic little widow, a cold, undemonstrative character was one she could not comprehend, so she looked upon the adorable Spoonbill as a walking enigma, which she tried hard to find out, and would on no account give up.

By dint of feminine pertinacity she did discover that the grandiloquent Boanerges, under strict promise of marriage, had wheedled Miss Spoonbill into the imprudence of placing her fortune in his hands. He knew of some wonderful investment, which would realize fabulous interest in this world and that which is to come. He disappeared the next morning from the village, bearing his spoil. That she had not heard of him since is needless to state.

Feeling it would be more conducive to her visitor's comfort if she were in some sort independent, Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, with rare delicacy, invented a codicil to her husband's will, to the effect, if any of his female relatives were found in reduced circumstances the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum was to be allowed out of the interest of certain funded moneys.

Miss Spoonbill, having made up her mind to patronize her Irish connexions on the strength of her English experience, birth, and education, was subdued by the extreme elegance of her new home. The grace of manner and gentle dignity of her hostess, while it placed her at perfect ease, somehow or other forbade all approach of undue familiarity.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### LAD RATHMORE AND PHILIP IRETON.

A BESEECHING letter from Tom took me back to Rathmore. His Lordship was still confined to his room, and still, somewhat unreasonably, insisted on his nephew's remaining with him. Tom had framed many excuses for getting away from time to time, but if he escaped for even a week, an urgent note, written by her Ladyship at his Lordship's dictation, and duly endorsed with his own sign manual, was sure to recall him. Lord Rathmore never having shown much attention to, or evinced much affection for honest Tom before, this unusual display of kindly feeling surprised the latter not a little; so in default of a better reason he supposed the old man's mind must be failing. In this he was mistaken; his uncle's intellects were keen, clear, and unclouded as in his youth; nor since that burst of excitement which so nearly cost him his life in the frenzied drive down the mountain side, had he evinced even his usual eccentricity.

Philip had long left the castle, but (so Tom was informed) had taken up his abode in a little fishing-village some two miles distant from Rathmore.

Philip remaining at any time, and enduring the discomforts of a mud-cabin on the west coast of Ireland, was something in itself so surpassingly strange as to warrant the worst surmises. Tom had not seen him at the castle for months ; if he visited there during his short sojourns at Dorian Castle he did not care to inquire.

Lady Rathmore received me graciously, but I saw it was a great relief to her my declining her offer of a bed at the castle. She was paler than when we last saw her a few months since ; her eyes seemed larger, with a look of hardness altogether foreign to their former expression. All this may have been the result of constant attendance on the patient and want of sympathy with her surroundings.

She was unwearied in her attention to her husband, and bore his petulance, and, more difficult still, his assurance of his affection, with unwavering forbearance.

An indescribable something had appeared of late about her, not altogether in her manner, certainly not in her speech ; a sort of *substratum* of feeling, something that was lying deep beneath both her manner and speech, hidden far back and thrust out of sight, as if some purpose was gradually dawning on her mind whose undeveloped nature was still undefined.

Tom and I had the greater part of the day to ourselves, for Lord Rathmore never expressed a wish to see him till evening. He would then send for him, and make a hundred pretexts for keeping him by his bedside, till the small hours of the

peering about him and starting nervously at every sound. He seldom spoke unless he feared Tom was about to leave him. Overcome by fatigue or the silence and dreariness around, the watcher would sometimes doze, then the old man, grasping him with his vice-like fingers by the arm, would whisper in a startled voice, "Hist, awake, listen!" Tom would start up and listen intently, but no unusual sound was ever heard, nothing but the occasional cry of a sea-bird, the piping of the winds, or perhaps the dull plashing of the rain, while under all boomed the thunderous ground-bass of the "loud-resounding ocean." Stoutly declaring he was wide awake, and not at all sleepy, he would gradually doze off again, again to be roused by the mysterious old man who seemed to hear a hostile foot-fall in the quiet pulsings of the stilliest night.

Lady Rathmore, as a rule, had ceased entering his room after night-fall. He whispered to Tom one evening he was afraid of her. Her gliding into his room; lamp in hand, reminded him of some great actress he had seen, long ago, enacting the sleep-walking scene in "Macbeth." He had forgotten her name, but the figure shrouded in white, with dishevelled hair, wide staring eyes and horror-stricken face had never been effaced from his memory.

Tom thoughtlessly mentioned this to Lady Rath-

more as a capital joke : on hearing it she had grown so deadly white, he feared she was about to faint, and hurriedly rang the bell for assistance ; before it arrived she had recovered herself, and complaining of spasms of the heart retired to her own room.

One lovely afternoon, wearied of wandering, purposelessly, among the black rocks and along the "yellow sands," I threw myself down in a little shady nook formed by two immense boulders, and amused myself by idly watching the white and grey gulls soaring with motionless wings in the calm air, and the dark tanned sails of the fishing-boats glowing red in the ruby splendours of the dying sunset, which, blending sky and ocean in the distant west, made the horizon appear one vast sea of glory. The tiny wavelets broke at my feet in silver monotonous, and the far-off murmur of the answering deep came softly on the odorous air. Dreaming of Violet and our moonlit walk amid the majestic ruins of the Coliseum I gently glided into sleep.

I was aroused by a confused sound of voices near me, which seemed to have either blended with or been evolved out of my dreams. They became more distinct ; I knew the speakers. They were Lady Rathmore and Philip Ireton.

The latter was speaking, and never did the musical cadences of his rich voice sound more eloquent with passionate feeling.

"You left no time for repentance, Lucy—pardon ! —Lady Rathmore, in that you were less merciful than Heaven against its worst offenders."



when did your penitence manifest itself?" asked she scornfully.

"From the moment I found you had left my uncle's house so suddenly," he returned.

"Pardon me. Not so—true repentance is known by its fruits. I must demand, in self-defence again, how did yours manifest itself?"

I heard nothing in reply to this difficult question. Something was muttered—an explanation, I presume, the words of which were inaudible.

"This is not the first, nor second, nor third time you have recurred to this subject, Mr. Ireton. I must request you not to allude to it again; except in the presence of my husband."

"Your husband!" he retorted, with a sarcastic laugh. "And what a husband! whose only safeguard against his being indicted as a murderer is that he is, at times, a madman; a husband who, for some whim worthy of the devil, has twice placed your life in danger."

She must have spoken some bitter words to challenge such a reply.

"Not mine alone—his own," she said slowly.

"And what value can be placed on his miserable existence? A cypher when compared to a millionth part of the worth of yours. What man, what woman—no, not even you, his wife—would have expressed, much less felt, a regret had he been slain on the rocks, or drowned in the sea?"

“I should have regretted him out of my deep gratitude to one who had raised me from dependence to independence, from penury to affluence, and given me rank and station. So assured, I can listen even to *your* taunts unmoved,” she returned proudly.

“And for this you bartered your self-respect?”

“Thank you for reminding me of it. It tells me this interview must end here. Good day.” I heard her move, as if departing.

“And this is woman’s gratitude!” cried Philip.

“I saved your life; have wandered here, watched and waited for you day by day, stood at night by your window, happy if I saw your shadow on the blind. And now you treat me with more scorn than if I were your enemy’s dog!”

“You are an exacting creditor, Mr. Ireton. Have you delivered your account in full? no item overlooked? I am grateful for my life preserved—doubly so for the preservation of my husband’s, as for the rest, I regret that on my account you should waste so much valuable time by seeking a meeting I have no inclination to grant, or acting Romeo before an unsympathetic window-blind. Give me due notice of the next performance, and I will summon the household to attend. Mrs. O’Dowds would make an interesting Juliet,” and her clear laugh rang musically on the evening air, yet with all its sweetness it was burthened with a world of biting scorn.

“Your husband can take the part of the Apothecary; he will suit it admirably; he will need no disguise, no adventitious aid to render the representation perfect!” he retorted rudely.

drove up to the castle, under the pretence of visiting his Lordship, and inquiring after his health ; I have secured an invitation, at least for a week. So you must bear with me for a little while, despite your anger and dislike," he replied, with something of deferential sorrow in his voice.

"You must go!" she said.

"Go!" he reiterated.

"Yes, or I will tell my husband—" she paused.

"What?" he demanded.

"That the guest whose presence he at first insisted on, and who won his second invitation by a lie, was a traitor to all who ever trusted him—to the brother of whom he was jealous—to the woman he professed to love. Why should I shrink from telling my husband that? The dishonour that brands Philip Ireton, can cast no shadow of disgrace on the brow of Lady Rathmore," she replied proudly.

"You are very hard upon me," he returned submissively.

"Hard?" she echoed.

"Yes, hard. Oh, Lucy—" he began.

"Lady Rathmore," she said, correcting him.

"Well, Lady Rathmore be it, though the name only shows how wide the gulf is between us."

"A gulf indeed," she said, evidently touched by his contrition, real or feigned. "Who made it?"

"I, by my folly, my madness! Oh, Lucy! I will call you by the old familiar name in spite of your prohibition. I never knew or felt how passionate was my love, till I knew I had lost you—yet not wholly lost."

"What then?" she questioned, with quick fierceness.

"You said, you swore you loved me once, can love so soon forget? Do you remember that evening in the park—the dying sunset flooding the air with beauty as now; the moon just rising in the softened heavens, and the fragrant may-blossoms crowning us with their snowy sweetness. You would have fallen—"

"Enough, Mr. Ireton. I well remember that scene, and its sequel the following night. Do you think I can ever forget it? No; it is engraven on my heart in imperishable characters. But why recall such scenes, when the very allusion to them implies an insult?" she said, turning again to depart.

"Insult is a strong term," he said deprecatingly.

"But not the less true. Why affect to misunderstand you, when explanation might only lead to a deeper indignity? Is not your very persistency, baffled until now, in trying to meet me, as you confessed a while ago, an offence? your very plea of love a desecration? Leave Rathmore Castle, Mr. Philip Ireton—lest I tell his Lordship the honourable guest he entertains."

"Tell him what you like," cried he, stung to defiance; "and then add this, if he were dead"—did I hear a movement as if she started, or was it merely fancy?—"no mortal power should prevent me, no,

more soon than.

I could not by any means, save discovery, have escaped from the position I was in. It seemed to me better that both Lady Rathmore and Philip should suppose their interview unwitnessed, at least at that time.

She came down to the very edge of the shore, and the soft waves fell with a lapsing motion and gentle "susurrus" down at her very feet as doing homage to her great beauty. She stood gazing on the quiet, peaceful ocean (with all its strange secrets of life and death lying deep in its silent bosom) with the full splendours of the gorgeous sunset falling around her and framing her in purple, vermilion, and amber. She gazed long and intently in the glassy mirror stretching before her, her profile turned half towards me. After some moments of silence she murmured, "Love me! Does he *really* love me? Was it my poverty and the fear of displeasing his uncle on whom so much of his future depends? was it these alone raised a barrier between us he wanted the moral courage to break down? If he loved, would the poverty of her he loved make him give her up when he had wealth sufficient for both? Have I forgotten what I vowed never to forget, or am I mad to reason thus? Love? A man's self-sacrifice for love is but a schoolgirl's dream. Wealth mates with wealth despite of age and rank. This is a practical

age, and we must go with it maugre the heart and all life's beautiful romance. The heart! affections! What are women's affections but scorpions to sting her to the cruel death? What man's? Self, self, and vanity. Is it possible I am so weak, so forgiving as to love him still? He would marry me if—" she paused and shivered as if stricken by sudden cold.

A servant from the castle approached and spoke to her. She did not appear to hear him. Again he addressed her, but to no purpose; then a third time in a louder tone. He gave her a message from his Lordship. She started as if from a reverie, spoke to him hurriedly and confusedly. Having ascertained his errand she motioned him to proceed, and followed him slowly towards Rathmore Castle. I followed her without obtruding myself on her observation. I fully appreciated and reprobated Philip's conduct. Passion had so blinded him that he appeared unable to recognize that the very fact of professing love for Lucy was a sin against herself and against her husband, although he framed his sole hopes of reward on that husband's death. Surely he will leave Rathmore now. Lucy behaved admirably, but still "He comes too near who comes to be denied." By-the-bye Lady Rathmore is severe on man's affections. "Self, self, and vanity." Not so, Lady Rathmore; love lays self on the altar as the noblest sacrifice to his divinity.

Some hours later I met Philip flushed and excited. He held a small perfumed note crushed in his hand.

"How long do you intend staying here?" he asked brusquely.

“Lady Rathmore presents her compliments to Mr. Philip Ireton, and regrets, in consequence of the continued illness of his Lordship, she cannot ask him to remain at the castle, as her paramount duties to her husband claim her undivided attention.”

“Of course you will go too?” he asked, as I handed him back the letter with a smile.

“At once, on receiving so uncompromising a dismissal,” I returned drily. He appeared nettled.

“What do you think of it?” he asked, after a short silence, during which he stood looking at the ground and beating it impatiently with his foot.

“That her Ladyship is a more prudent and sensible woman than I thought,” I returned quietly. He coloured.

“You use strange terms in reference to so slight an affair,” he said, turning away.

“But not inappropriate.”

“What do you mean?” he inquired quickly.

“Shall I tell you?”

“I demand your answer.”

“Remembering,” I said slowly, “you once professed a passion for Lucy Graham, once asked her, no matter how wrongfully, to be your wife, it may seem well to Lady Rathmore not to encourage an intimacy between you, now she is the wife of another.”

"And such another!" he exclaimed, with a slight laugh.

"Her husband and your host," I said somewhat sternly. "Two claims which make him sacred."

"You are sententious as a schoolboy's copy-book," he retorted, the deep blood dyeing his olive cheek, and laughing uneasily. "Do you not see the meaning of this mincing note? Is it not plain as sunlight? She wants to humiliate me as once I humiliated her, as I drove her from my uncle's—no, *my* house—she would drive me from hers," he cried impetuously. "But I will conquer yet."

In the fulness of his anger he hardly knew the full meaning of his passionate threat or how his admission might be construed into a meditated wrong. I had often seen him insolent, haughty, supercilious, angry before—manifesting a degree of insolence in all—but never had beheld him so energetically enraged. As I looked on him, flushed with anger, even while wondering at his baseness I could not but admire his handsome face and form, handsome as the tiger wooing his forest bride.

"I am satisfied," I said, in answer to his assertion. "Lady Rathmore has had some more urgent motive in writing to you than the mere apology for not playing the part of hostess, based on the plea of her husband's health. But whatever the true reason may be, you must at least respect her wishes, and go. Possibly one consideration may occur to her—it would hardly be pleasant for her did the report spread that, during her husband's illness, she entertained her quondam lover."

"I wonder you came," he sneered.



SMOOTH pebbles that surfaced the carriage-drive. After a little while he said hesitatingly, "You will not mention this insulting note to—to Basil?"

"No; and I'm sorry you showed it me."

"Why?" he demanded, with evident surprise.

"Because you have unwittingly made me your confidant."

"Unwittingly? I gave it openly," he cried, still more astonished.

"The letter, yes; but not the deeper meaning that lies hidden in the dismissal, or in your threat of conquest," I replied.

"I spoke foolishly; forget it all," and he sauntered slowly away. Had I lost an opportunity? The thought struck me, would it not have been more honourable in me to have told him how I had overheard his speaking to Lucy by the sea, and connecting the words then spoken with his subsequent dismissal, told him how well it would be for both should they never see each other more? He spoke of his love *for* her, of his determination, in the event of her husband's death, to make her his wife; and she, with all her indignant scorn, had to herself confessed she loved him. Had not he shown me the letter, I would have felt I had no right to play the Mentor to him; but when he had, in a manner, invited my confidence, ought not I to have taken advantage of the opportunity afforded me?

I heard Lady Rathmore's voice in the hall. She was speaking to one of the servants: "If Lord Rathmore inquires for me, tell him I have a headache, and have retired to my own room. On no pretext whatever do I wish to be disturbed."

"If his Lordship—" began the valet.

"I have given my commands; they admit of no exceptions," she said, with cold decision, and disappeared up the broad stairs.

I dined there—at the castle, I mean—but she did not appear at the dinner-table, compensating for her absence by many gracious apologies. The duties of host and hostess devolved on Tom, who was rather pleased than otherwise at the absence of the latter. He was in high spirits; his uncle had communicated his wishes to him at last, and given him a sealed packet, not to be opened till after his death. Feeling so much better, he had, unwillingly, consented to Tom's leaving him for a time. I was delighted at the prospect of getting away so soon. Dinner being over, and the capital wine discussed, Tom Dorian returned to his uncle's room, and I strolled into the moonlit garden, to enjoy my meerschaum. I marked two figures walking side by side in its most sequestered path; I recognized them at once as those of Lady Rathmore and Philip Ireton. I knew not whether they had heard my approach or that their interview was ended, but they separated, Philip climbing the garden wall by the aid of a pear-tree. A strange meeting, thought I, after all that has passed—a strange mode of exit. When Lady Rathmore saw me she started, but in an instant her self-command returned. She was quite composed when

“ Mr. Ireton has chosen a curious mode of departure, Mr. O’Hara,” she remarked carelessly. “ You know he was always indolent, and he saves himself half a mile by crossing the cliffs. He was saying ‘ good-bye.’ He sleeps at your hotel to-night, wishing, I believe, to catch the mail car in the morning, *en route* for Dublin.”

“ I must thank you for your hospitality, Lady Rathmore, on which I feel I have intruded too—”

She interrupted me. “ You are Lord Rathmore’s guest ; as such, your presence can never be held as an intrusion by his wife,” she replied, with measured courtesy. “ Besides, I owe you a debt of gratitude ; you saved my husband’s life and mine. If life is worth preserving,” she added wearily.

“ Worth preserving ! You have much to live for. This is a very beautiful place, and, though retired, has nevertheless many duties connected with it. The opening or shutting of your white hand could make hundreds—nay, thousands—happy or miserable.”

“ I am afraid I was never born to play the Lady Bountiful in a wild country place. Oh, Mr. O’Hara, you look at me now as you looked on that morning which changed all the current of my life—the morning on which you said to me, ‘ Beaumelle was a guilty woman.’ ”

"Would it not be best," I said gently, "to forget the past and all its memories, which may only tend to make the present so irksome."

"Irksome!" with a troubled look, she said; "who said the present was irksome?"

"You spoke as if you were weary of your life, when you asked me if it were worth preserving," I explained softly.

"And you replied, this was a beautiful place, and spoke of duties. How long may I enjoy it—how long perform duties here, even if once undertaken?"

"For many years," I hope.

She seemed buried in deep thought. After an interval of silence, during which she walked slowly by my side, she said,—

"Dare I ask you how—Mr. Basil is?"

"Well," was my laconic reply.

"Has—has he quite forgiven me?" she inquired hesitatingly.

"Quite—long since."

There was again an interval of silence. It was broken by her voice, so strangely altered in its musical cadence I almost thought some other person spoke.

"You have expressed a hope I may long enjoy this place. I cannot disguise from myself the fact that Lord Rathmore is greatly shaken; he has never recovered that terrible drive."

"His physician," I said encouragingly, "told me this morning he might discontinue his visits, his patient was so much better; that his constitution must have been vigorous to ever have recovered

relationship.

"I hope so." She seemed plunged for some time in perplexed thought, then said, with a dark smile,—

"You are aware—I am speaking to you as a friend; whom have I else?—there were no settlements on my marriage?"

I intimated having heard something to that effect, and expressed my surprise at the want of prudence in her advisers.

"My brother-in-law and sister were too glad to get rid of me on any honourable terms to care greatly about my interests. There was no one to act for me. You are aware my husband has made no will."

"No will!" I cried with astonishment.

"That is, since our marriage. If he dies, what are my prospects?"

"Mr. Dorian is too generous, too honourable to suffer you to be the victim of your friends' want of prudence and your husband's want of thought," I returned, full of faith in Tom.

"The generosity of an heir-at-law towards a penniless woman, who even for a few years has entrenched on what he might deem his sole right, will not be very signal."

"You don't know Tom—Mr. Dorian," I urged;

“he is as generous and noble-hearted a fellow as ever breathed.”

“You were always an enthusiast in your friendships. How is it a man’s friendship for a man is always more staunch, more generous, more noble than it is for a woman? We have grand historic records of man’s unswerving faith towards man; but where do we read, save in poetry or romance, of his stainless truth towards woman.”

“Are women always faithful?” I suddenly paused, remembering to whom I spoke, and unwilling to wound her anew.

“Believe me, Mr. O’Hara, faithlessness always bears its own punishment, though, Spartan-like, we draw the concealing cloak over the wound, and repress the cry that would rise from our hearts, till we die.”

“You speak sadly for one so young, Lady Rathmore,” said I, feeling I must say something, and touched in spite of myself; not that I could ever pardon her for the past, and all that one dear as my own life had suffered for her sake.

“Young! I scarcely realize what the word means. I never was young. Educated in a French convent, with all its littlenesses, its jealousies, its hypocrisy; living with Lady O’Shaughnessy, whose creed was that the gift of beauty, talents, accomplishments in a girl were solely valuable as the means of winning her a handsome settlement in life, with nothing of worth in themselves; seeing nothing but the baser side of the medal till I lived with Dr. Ireton, and by my own act forfeited his esteem, what should I know of youth and its purity of heart?” She spoke in such self-scorn: as if the con-

... to my unspoken thoughts, that you may think more leniently of me, and not refuse your assistance should I seek it."

Whether my looks betrayed me, or whether she merely gave utterance to what she had desired to say, I cannot tell, but I felt abashed for the moment hearing so true a response to my unexpressed wonder.

"You do not answer me," she said inquiringly.

"So far as I can be true to others I will not refuse you my aid, Lady Rathmore."

"I think I understand your reservation. It has no reference to Mr. Dorian?"

"None whatever," I rejoined with emphasis. We came to a low wall, built on the very edge of the steep rock on which the garden was placed. She leaned on the low parapet, her white arms gleaming in the moonlight. She was in an evening dress of some delicate material, with a black lace shawl falling round her queenly head and shoulders, Spanish-wise.

Whatever her purpose may have been, she seemed for the time to forget it. She gazed on the near horizon, where sky and ocean seemed to blend in soft darkness. The lustrous moon, with all her train of stars, cast long tracks of silvery light upon the tremulous ocean, whose ceaseless plaint came wailing up to our ears.

“If you see Lord Rathmore to-night, do not mention having met with me.” I bowed, in acquiescence to her wish. She continued, “I have been suffering horribly from headache all day. I am a little weary and worn by my constant attention to him. Mind and body need rest. He might think it unkind of me, feeling myself equal to come out, and yet not to visit him.”

“I was sorry to hear you were unwell. The servant announced your inability to appear at the dinner-table. I must apologize for not trusting you were better before, though your being able to leave your room reassured me.”

“The fresh air has revived me. I still feel weak. I would not for worlds Lord Rathmore knew I was out this night!”

Heavens! how pale she had become. How white and parched her lips; so dry, they appeared hardly to have the power of forming the words. Did she fear her husband so much? Was it her meeting with Philip (how brought about I never heard) she so dreaded his knowing? and wherefore? My guiltiest imagination, connecting the present with the recent past, could form no plausible theory to account for this inexplicable expression of dread.

“I will keep your secret,” I said.

“From all?”

“From all. Good night.”

Her voice arrested my steps.

Turning her face resolutely from me, she continued,—

“I would ask a favour from you, Mr. O’Hara, and rely on your courtesy to grant it. You seem to



our respective ages; but, as I said before, I was never young, and you seem older than your years. The deep love and protecting care you have ever had for Mr.—your—Mr. Basil Ireton has gone far to create and foster this idea in all who know you.”

I felt she was right in that, and wondered how she came by the knowledge. When next she spoke her voice was subdued to a whisper.

“If my husband dies—”

Taking advantage of a slight hesitation in her manner, I said,—

“I must remind you the doctor has promised him many years—that is, comparatively—with ordinary care.”

She took no heed of my interruption further than to glance at me rapidly and again turn from me. She went on as if there had been no break.

“Without making his will, or rather a new will, for an old one is in existence, framed some years prior to our marriage, I shall be as utterly dependent on the charity of friends as Lady Rathmore, as I was when Lucy Graham. Mr. Dorian may be all you say, but what claim have I on his generosity, even if I could accept as a charity what ought to be my own as a right? He is the heir of this place, and wealthy irrespective of his expectations from his uncle—” She paused.

“What follows, Lady Rathmore?”

With an effort, as if forcing herself to turn to me, she said,—

“I would ask you, doing no wrong to Mr. Dorian, to use your influence with Lord Rathmore, and persuade him, as the duty of an honourable man, not to leave his widow depending for her daily bread on the almsgiving of strangers.”

“This is altogether an unusual request, Lady Rathmore. You are entrusting me with so delicate a commission, do not think me unkind if I fear I must decline to undertake it.”

There was something more than an expression of mere disappointment in the sudden spasm which, crossing the face, annihilated for the time all traces of its loveliness. It shocked me into an agreement with her wishes.

“It would be presumptuous in me to suppose I had such influence over Lord Rathmore as to warrant my thrusting myself into his private affairs.” Again that look, so puzzling in its undefined expression. “But what I can do I will; that is, if you really entertain any serious fears for your husband’s life.” How colourless the parted lips! “I will speak to Tom Dorian to-night—now—at once—if the doing so will ease your mind. Omitting your appeal to me altogether, I will put the case before him as best I may, and whatever he elects to do in the matter, rest assured will be well and generously done.”

“I can trust you?” she whispered huskily.

“You may.”

With a slight motion of the head she glided

Tom Dorian and pleaded his fair aunt's cause so well, he engaged there and then to see his uncle and lay the case before him. It being late when our interview ended, I took my solitary way to the village inn.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR—THE CODICIL.

I SAUNTERED slowly along, revolving many things. Notwithstanding Lady Rathmore's ready explanation, Philip's manner—so guilty-like—of leaving the garden bewildered me. I knew he was in no way gifted with the Romeo-like propensity of surmounting garden-walls, so long as there was an open gate and smooth pathway; besides he could have reached the village by the cliffs all the same, or nearly so, by making his exit by the gate. On arriving at the inn, I found that Philip had taken a bed there, and retired leaving orders to have himself called at daybreak. He was going to extend his tour along the west coast,—not to Dublin, as Lady Rathmore imagined. Tempted by the beauty of the night, and feeling in no need of rest, I strolled slowly up the street with the purposeless purpose of an idle man. I turned into a by-street neither dark nor narrow, but poor and squalid-looking from the dilapidated state of its hovels, to which even the gracious effulgence of the refining moonlight could lend no grace or beauty. Most of the denizens of this unpromising thoroughfare appeared buried in

THE DARK SHADOW IN WHICH THE FACE OF THE PERSON  
lay. I was about to turn from this unsavoury  
neighbourhood, when a tall, slight figure, closely  
enveloped in a dark shawl, rivetted my attention.  
I was standing in the shade. It came cautiously  
along, looking from right to left, as if unacquainted  
with the neighbourhood, but in quest of something  
it knew to be there. It paused before the ill-fitting  
door of the hut where the dull candle faintly shone  
through the filth-stained window, and knocked at  
the door hesitatingly. There was no response, then  
the mysterious figure lifted the latch, and looking  
hurriedly around, as fearful of being observed, glided  
through the open door. Impelled by an unaccount-  
able curiosity—by something in the appearance of  
the visitor so out of keeping with the neighbour-  
hood, by something in the grace of motion that  
appeared familiar to me, yet where I had seen it  
before I could not then conjecture—still keeping in  
the gloom I walked noiselessly down the street till I  
came nearly opposite the house. Crossing over I  
looked cautiously through the dim window, which  
was almost blinded by cobwebs and dirt. Before  
the glowing embers of a peat fire crouched a hideous-  
looking old crone, the incarnation of one of Shak-  
speare's witch-dreams. She was miserably clad, and  
her grey unkempt hair hung loosely about her face,  
and naked shoulders. Beside her stood the tall

figure, so shrouded that no feature was visible, nothing but one white hand on one of whose shapely fingers, a ruby burned like flame as it caught the glowing firelight.

“Hush!” whispered the figure, holding up that shapely hand as my footfall smote upon her ear. The withered beldame mumbled something, and rising with difficulty with the aid of a crutch, came hobbling to the door. I slipped into the darkness of an archway near the hut. I heard the door open and close. After a short space of time it opened again. Looking out, I espied the same figure walking swiftly down the street. Urged on by some impulse stronger than mere curiosity, I followed it, still keeping in the shade. The figure having left the village, proceeded at a rapid pace along the high road leading to Rathmore Castle. Notwithstanding its speed, there was a lithe grace in its every movement. Was it familiar to me? Pshaw! what folly! the very lunacy of insane conjecture! Dwelling on, yet reprobating my ridiculous idea as to its identity, I kept close watch on its every motion.

It was now near the gates of the castle avenue, but instead of passing through them, suddenly disappeared through a break in the fence, and was lost amid the stunted plantation. I followed rapidly, yet cautiously, but could discover no trace of the mysterious visitant of the squalid cottage. Giving up the chase (my idea still clinging to me with strange persistency), I struck into the carriage-drive and proceeded to the castle. Late as the hour was, I knew Tom and some of the servants would be up,

IN ANSWER TO MY INQUIRIES, SHE TOLD ME HER MISTRESS was much better, and hoped, when Mr. Dorian retired, to resume her interrupted duties by his Lordship's bedside."

I thought, "So she has forgiven her husband's foolish terrors, and is going to attend him at night again."

Tom at that moment appeared. "I was afraid you had left the castle for the night. I am glad to see you, and to tell you I have induced that very impracticable uncle of mine, to make a codicil to his will, settling a handsome jointure on his wife. The attorney is still with him, and I want you to witness his signature." Thanking him warmly for his noble disinterestedness, I followed him into the sick man's chamber.

His eccentric Lordship was buried in a huge bed, plumed, curtained, and decorated like a hearse. Scarcely any part of him was visible save his small, inquisitive eyes and little hooked nose. He looked at me with a comical leer as Tom, to hide his triumph at his success, officiously arranged pen, ink, and the important document, signifying our readiness to witness his Lordship's name being duly signed. His Lordship having motioned the attorney to leave the room with much irascibility, to his nephew's ill-concealed amazement, seized the legal document and viciously tore it across. He enjoyed our be-

wildered looks for a time with infinite zest, not the less as they betrayed our disappointment. Having chuckled silently till the tears ran down his cheeks, he drew a second deed from under his pillow and folding it with ostentatious care, so that no word could be seen by even the most curious, nor one iota of its contents be known, he again raised his shrivelled figure, and in a shaky hand signed the paper, which we, not without secret misgivings, duly witnessed and attested. "Seal it, seal it, seal it," he cried, in an excited manner, "close, close, that not a fly can pry into its contents." He kept his hand upon it with jealous care till Tom hastily sealed it up, burning his own and his Lordship's fingers in the operation. With a snarl, like an angry ferret, his mightiness withdrew his hand, but uttered not a word of complaint; he then handed the deed to me, and said, "Give this to that man that left the room—the lawyer, I mean—and tell him if he breathes a word about its contents—I'll, I'll poison him!" with vicious emphasis. We bade him good-bye, as we intended to leave for Dublin early in the morning and did not wish to disturb him. He looked at Tom with a long, wistful gaze as he held his hand.

"You have done yourself great wrong in inducing me to sign that codicil," he said, half regretfully.

"If you have—had" (correcting himself) "not acted fairly by Lady Rathmore, you would have done yourself a greater wrong, and that would have been a heavier regret to me than any loss I may have sustained. When a man marries a wife he's bound



...making-horn, though these mountains play the very devil with a good horse."

A faint smile broke over the old man's face, and an expression of regretful tenderness, utterly foreign to its usual aspect, took possession of it.

"You will be Lord Rathmore," he said. "We have seen but little of each other, Tom. I'm sorry for it now; but my ways I sometimes think were not the ways of men in general, and I—I *feel* that what my neighbours termed 'harmless eccentricity' was"—he broke off and looked around him suspiciously—then in a low whisper, drawing Tom's ear close to his mouth, "was undeveloped madness. I never felt so devil-possessed as on that day of our last drive. They say the madmen of old were 'possessed;' hush! don't hint this to Lady Rathmore; she—she might put me in a mad-house." There was a gleam of terror in the old man's restless eyes as he spoke.

We were both so inexpressibly shocked we could find no words, suitable words that is, to utter for some minutes. At length we endeavoured to speak cheerfully to him. Tom extolled highly Lady Rathmore's unremitting kindness and attention to her husband during his illness, endeavouring to disabuse his mind of any wrongful idea he might entertain concerning her; as in his earnestness the pleader leaned over him, the invalid lay looking curiously

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into his eyes (his own lids half closed) with a furtive, observant regard. Always capricious, his gentler mood had passed.

“Is he gone?” whispered Lord Rathmore, in a terrified voice.

“Who?” demanded Tom, blushing uneasily; I was standing at the foot of the bed, and he imagined the question bore reference to me. I thought his wits were beginning to wander, he seemed so frightened without any visible cause of alarm.

“The man I met out boating.”

“Oh, Philip Ireton!” exclaimed Tom, considerably relieved. The old peer rapidly nodded assent, after the supposed manner of a Chinese mandarin.

“Yes, I believe so.”

He lay back in silence with closed eyes, appearing to ponder. He soon became excited. Beckoning Tom to bend down to him, he whispered, “Lady Rathmore is changed since that Hyperion came into the house. They knew and loved each other before. She loved him, yet she wed with me; she must be mad. Fancy,” he hissed, shaking with terror, “having a mad woman to attend on me! She might poison me, by mistake—by mistake, you know. Draw back those curtains—quick—I saw her glaring at me between their cursed folds!”

Telling Tom to watch him, I hurried out of the room, and saddling a horse, rode off at once for the village doctor. I feared he had been smitten with fever and was becoming delirious. On my return with the unrenowned Esculapius, he applied such remedies as he thought necessary, and offered to remain with his patient all night, an offer which Tom, in

I wished to see her particularly, and trusted her Ladyship would consider the urgency of the case as a sufficient excuse for the lateness of the hour. The messenger, a bribe having induced him to transgress the positive orders he had received, returned.

“Lady Rathmore would see me immediately.”

I looked at her searchingly as she entered the room where I stood awaiting her coming. She was flushed and excited looking, her eyes sparkling with unusual brilliancy—unusual even in them. She was affected with that peculiar tremulous motion of lip I have spoken of before, and always remarked in her when labouring under any subdued excitement. How white her taper fingers showed against the background of her sable robes, my eyes fell on them curiously, but they bore no ornament of any kind save the simple marriage-ring.

“I hope your headache is better.”

“Yes; I have slept; it’s quite gone.”

“Then you did not venture out again? The night air is sometimes dangerous.”

“Out? Since when? Oh! since I saw you in the garden? No, I have rested.”

This was spoken with such perfect unconcern, that my suspicions were disarmed at once.

“I am happy to say Tom Dorian has succeeded with Lord Rathmore. The latter has made an addi-

tion to his will in your favour. I am not in a position to enter into particulars, but Tom believes he has acted handsomely, if not nobly."

A triumphant flashing of the eye, a quick flushing of the cheek, quickly succeeded by a ghastly pallor of lip and cheek, a struggle as if for breath, and Lady Rathmore would have fallen to the ground, had I not caught her.

"You are ill," placing her in a chair. "I will call for your servant."

Her lips rather formed than syllabled "No," and she placed her hand feebly on my arm to detain me.

"I am nervous," she said faintly; "have been over-exerting myself. I will go to—my husband." She shuddered, as with difficulty she pronounced the word.

"You had better not for a little while," said I, remembering the fear he expressed, and dreading lest her presence might aggravate him to say something to wound her in his delirium.

"Why?" she murmured.

"Because Lord Rathmore has suffered from a slight attack of illness."

"You offer a strange excuse to debar a wife from a husband's presence, Mr. O'Hara; but I will trust to your judgment, although its decision surprises me. Is it not strange I was not warned of his indisposition?"

"Did you not give express orders not to be disturbed on any pretext whatever?" I remonstrated, gladly seizing on so plausible an excuse for not having her told the intelligence she surely had the best right to hear.

the time of his new attack.

"About an hour," I replied. She heaved a sigh as if unexpectedly relieved from the pressure of some great anxiety.

"I have to thank you for your attention, Mr. O'Hara, to my Lord Rathmore, also for your prompt acquiescence to my wishes. Pray thank Mr. Dorian in my name. I fear you will both think me very mercenary, but I have known the wretchedness of poverty too lately not to shrink from its threatened approach. Do you think Lord Rathmore's attack dangerous?"

"In what way?"

"How should any illness be dangerous?" she questioned in reply.

"I do not think Lord Rathmore's life in danger from his illness."

That reservation may appear strange. It was simply made from the reasonable dread that he might do himself some deadly violence in his delirium if not well watched.

"From whence, then, do you apprehend danger?" she returned, turning on me suddenly with flashing eye, as if daring the worst.

"In his present state he might injure himself, and yet be hardly conscious of the act," I replied gravely.

“I dreaded to ask you the nature of his illness, Mr. O’Hara.” She spoke gently as if anxious to do away with any painful impression her former manner might have made on me. You have only confirmed my fears. It is very dreadful!” she continued with a sigh. “When did the attack come on, did you say?”

“Soon *after* he signed the codicil to his will in your favour.”

She gave me a grateful smile as understanding the full value of the admission.

“I will go and see Lord Rathmore.”

Remembering the dread he had expressed of her, a dread born of the hallucination of his distempered mind, it seemed best to me to prevent, if possible, her visiting him till he became more calm.

“If I might advise, I would suggest the entire leaving of Lord Rathmore in the doctor’s hands this night. He has offered to take the place you were about to resume by the patient’s side, and you—you require rest. He would have more control over him if he became excited. He might (there’s no knowing) even call for and destroy the valuable document Tom prevailed upon him to draw in your favour.”

She sat looking thoughtfully on the ground.

“If there is any doubt of Lord Rathmore’s sanity, could Mr. Dorian, if so disposed, dispute—” she hesitated.

“Your husband’s expressed wishes will be held sacred, no matter what occurs. I think the writing and signing of the document upset him a little, nothing more.”

“I will act as you think best; I will not visit my

to their house in town, and will be, I am sure, anxious to see him."

"Lady Montague was twice married?"

"Yes, first to Lord Rathmore's brother (who assumed the name of Dorian, some property being left him on that condition), and afterwards to the late Sir William Montague. Tom is only Olive's and Vermeil's half-brother by birth, but more than whole brother in affection," I said warmly.

"I know very little of my husband's relatives. Good night."

The next morning Tom and I posted to Dublin in his comfortable travelling-carriage, having received favourable accounts from the doctor of Lord Rathmore's state. Philip had left the inn, and departed no one could say exactly whither.

## CHAPTER XX.

### LADY MONTAGUE AND FAMILY.

A FEW weeks after the arrival of Miss Penelope Spoonbill, Hildred was brought home—that is, to the only true home she then knew, Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's hospitable house. Each of the new arrivals regarded the other with a lively curiosity springing from entirely different causes.

The love of Mrs. Fitz-Gerald for her young charge aroused—if that be not too vigorous a term to apply to so unimpressionable a subject—a sluggish jealousy in the chaste bosom of the amiable spinster, that slowly developed itself into a sort of dull hatred. Each look, each token of affection bestowed on the orphan (what was she otherwise in position, if not in fact?), was viewed as a slight upon herself, and by constant brooding over it elevated into an absolute wrong. Her beauty (which even my blindness was beginning to discover), her winning manner, when free from the restraint of strangers, her affection for her protectress—nay, the very admiration that beauty, manner, and affection excited in others—gave Miss Penelope perpetual cause of offence.



overcome it; and Penelope hated her all the more for that she saw her antipathy was known and disregarded. Casting about for some means to bring Hildred within the reach of her spleen, she gratuitously undertook to instruct her in the sublime art of patience, forbearance, self-repression, and impassibility; but, however skilled the teacher might be in those excellent virtues, her mode of instruction was so distasteful to the scholar, it only tended to develop those very failings it was designed to correct. This failure in no measure displeased Miss Spoonbill, it indeed rather gratified her; for not only had she the satisfaction of regarding herself as a martyr in a good cause, but she enjoyed the martyrdom into the bargain, especially as it was a kind of slow torture to another, and that other a beautiful girl whom she fancied stood in the way.

She guessed there was something to be concealed about Hildred's family or antecedents—either guessed or heard some undefined surmise, which whispered of a secret, yet could not tell exactly what that secret was, or in what its mystery lay. She was very curious on the subject, but her wishes were not then destined to be gratified. She made several raids on the bright widow, but was ever met with the same unsatisfactory reply, "She was one in

whom a very particular friend took a deep interest."

Her next attack was on Hildred's self.

The past was too full of mournful memories—too replete with sorrow and, sadder still, disgrace—ever to allow her to confide its pathetic history to the ears of a stranger, and, least of all, to the present querist.

Then the fair inquisitor had recourse to divers stratagems, secret ambushes, and sudden surprises; darting out in a spider-like way from dark corners, and from behind doors, in the hope of overhearing fragments of secret conferences. She pounced on Hildred with sudden questions at unexpected times, and in divers manners; and so antagonistic were these unusual proceedings to her general reserved and undemonstrative bearing, Hildred declared "she must be rehearsing Harlequin for the next Christmas pantomime," and sometimes averred—"There must be ten Spoonbills in the house instead of one!"

But Miss Spoonbill built her trust on the Great Revealer, Time, and tried hard to imagine herself content to wait.

She was one of those who looked upon the "joyous merriment" of happy youth as an unanswerable argument in proof of our fallen nature, a sin to be reproved "in season and out of season," especially the latter.

"You Irish are so excitable, so enthusiastic," she remarked one day in allusion to some mirth of Hildred's. "It makes one—hem!—doubt—hem!—your sincerity."

andred is English, concluded Mrs. Fitz-Gerald demurely.

“Hem!—association—the force of association—hem!—obliterates the landmarks of civilization and nationality—hem!”

“Ha! ha!” laughed her hostess gaily, Miss Spoonbill being drowned in the torrent of her own eloquence. “Ha, ha! so you think my Irish excitability has spoilt my English girl? I love to be surrounded with happy faces; I love the merry laughter and pleasant voices of children. I sometimes think,” she said in a subdued, regretful voice, “it is well the happiness of being a mother was denied me; it might have taught my foolish heart idolatry; and yet I sometimes wish—”

“Hem!” ejaculated the virtuous Penelope, utterly scandalized that any opinion could be expressed, or wish formed, on so demoralizing a subject—“Hem!”

Hildred, who was present, nestled her head on her new mother’s bosom, or elder sister rather, if judged by their respective years, and not by the position they held towards each other in their daily life. The true-hearted widow, so young herself, yet so full of thoughtful consideration and tenderness towards youth, folded her lovingly in her arms, as she kissed her fair upturned forehead.

We—i.e. Tom Dorian and self—drove to Lady Montague's residence immediately on our arrival at Dublin. She, the fond mother, was delighted to see her stalwart son, and appeared pleased, to receive me, insisting, with a kindness that bore down all opposition, I should make her house my home as long as Tom remained in town. "Not longer," she said with her cheery laugh. "You bachelors are such dreadful bores for ladies to entertain without the aid of a gentleman. You moon about all the morning interrupting our pleasant avocations; you ask inane questions and call it conversation, worrying us to death, and, no doubt, thinking yourselves agreeable. After dinner you improve, but are apt to grow sentimental. One man talking romantic nonsense to three or four ladies of different ages is a pitiable mistake; they laugh at him in their sleeves, while he thinks they are charmed with his eloquence. We ladies are terrible hypocrites, Mr. O'Hara."

"You at least have the merit of sincerity, Lady Montague."

"Simply because I have not sufficient talent to be insincere; I should be found out at once. Ah! here come my daughters. Now Tom will be torn to pieces, or tormented to death for the whole evening. They are so fond of him. My darling girls—are they not improved, Mr. O'Hara?" And Lady Montague's eyes filled with proud and happy tears as she gazed on her reunited children.

Lady Montague was the sole child of old Jack Dorian, late of M——, a retired landlord who once

ruinous interest, he had increased it cent. per cent. The Honourable Thomas Rathmore, brother to Lord Rathmore, chancing to call on a shooting expedition, was so smitten with Miss Honora Dorian, he incontinently fell in love with her, forgot his sport, forsook his friends, and took to smoking cigars, drinking whisky-toddy, chaffing, and making love, to which Honora lent a willing ear. She was flattered by being preferred by one so far above her in social position, and, when asked, accepted him heartily. I do not mean to insinuate she would have married him so readily had she not fallen in love with him. She was a frank, dashing, merry, and withal sensible girl, and made him a capital wife during the brief period of their married life. When the irascible Lord Rathmore heard of his brother's *mésalliance*, his fury was ungovernable. He forbade his brother ever to visit Rathmore Castle again; insulted his wife, on whom he heaped every obnoxious epithet his (in that line) extensive vocabulary contained; and addressed a letter to old Jack Dorian so full of vituperation and contempt, that the old man swore in his wrath not one of his lordship's name should ever enjoy a penny of his hard-earned gains. Jack Dorian had his own stern and dogged pride, and was unbending as the best lord of them all. He was proud of his low birth and former ragged poverty when he thought of

his wealth, his possessions, and the power they gave him, and felt with swelling breast it was his own intellect, backed by his own exertion, had raised him above the one, and won for him the other.

The pride of a man who has been the maker of his own name is great as his whose name has been transmitted to him through unstained generations; nay, it is greater. The former looks forward to the worship of the future; the latter only back to the dimmed glories of the past.

Honora, aware of her father's resolute character, easily persuaded her husband, in the first weeks of their marriage, to give up a name which had cast him off, and assume one that belonged to one the old man was proud of; so the Honourable Thomas Rathmore, dropping name and title, became simple Mr. Dorian, and gained in exchange a shrewd, affectionate wife, who boasted of a handsome face and handsomer fortune, which had purchased its adjacent lands and erected Dorian Hall. About one year after her marriage her husband was killed in the hunting-field, a few weeks after the birth of his son and heir. His widow, being young and having a handsome jointure tightly settled upon herself, was not inconsolable. She went to live in Dublin, in order, she said, to give her infant son the benefit of a liberal education. With an unaccountable forgetfulness of this praiseworthy, though somewhat premature, intention, about one year after her husband's death, she captivated with her bright black eyes and hearty laugh a wealthy baronet, Sir William Montague by name, and went to reside with him on his paternal estates, in one of the

William slept with his fathers. Once more free to follow the bent of her inclinations, the light-hearted widow returned to Dublin, and, giving up once and for ever all thoughts of matrimony, devoted herself to the amusement of her children, which she called their education. Her son was wealthy; her highest ambition for him was to see him a country gentleman; to have him settled at Dorian Hall, a magnate among the magnates she had regarded with such admiring awe when a child, and to whom her father in those days humbly doffed his cap. As for her daughters, were they not beautiful?—at least *she* thought them so—were they not (for girls) handsomely provided for by their father's will? Could they not read, and write, and spell? Could they not play the piano, harp, lute, sacbut, dulcimer, and all manner of music? Could they not enter a room and get out of a carriage? Could they not dance and sing, and draw and paint? and, if the elder of the two was perfection already, was not the youngest on the high road to that blissful estate? and what could a loving, anxious mother desire more, or what a reasonable husband?

Having reduced Tom to a delightful state of helplessness and disorder of hair and dress with their sisterly affection, Vermeil perched herself on his

knee, while Olive welcomed me with a pleased look.

“So you have condescended at last to notice me?” I said, with affected pique.

“You were so engaged with mamma, and I—I—it was *so* good of you to bring Tom,” she said, with ever so little confusion in her manner.

She was *very, very, very* pretty, with long, dark-brown, silken lashes veiling her dove-like eyes, and lying tenderly on her cheek. There was a most charming blending of coquetry and sincerity in her manner *very* fascinating, *very* bewildering, and *very* dangerous—the “*veries*” emphasized as before.

“The gist of my welcome, I fear, lies in those two last words, Olive—‘bring Tom.’”

I had known her so long and well, felt so like a brother towards her, I had always called her by her Christian name.

“Don’t mind him, Olive,” cried Vermeil impetuously, springing from Tom’s knee, to the manifest destruction of part of his beard with which she had been playing. “Don’t mind him—he’s fishing for compliments. Men have had such a monopoly of vanity, they abuse women for attempting to deal in it, and so rival them. Stoop down that high-placed head of yours, sir, and kiss me.”

Mounting my boots by aid of my coat, she lifted up her bright face to mine.

“Hallo!” cried Tom, heartily amused, “here’s propriety!”

“My darling!” remonstrated Lady Montague, laughing nevertheless, “you really forget you are no longer a child.”



“I, for one, will vote you eleven for years to come,” I said.

“But I shan’t keep myself at that age. I intend to marry, and—there now, Olive looks shocked. If *she* doesn’t intend marrying, why does she flirt so much with that horrid Counsellor O’Grady?” cried Vermeil triumphantly.

“My love,” said Lady Montague, with an affectation of grave propriety that was patent to all except herself; “the counsellor is all very well, as a friend, under certain reservations. He is extremely useful in many ways; knows where the best and cheapest things are to be had, from a diamond coronet to a lady’s glove; is agreeable for a promenade; knows every one worth knowing, and *all* the most fashionable scandal; efficient at a dinner-party, as he carves beautifully, and has always plenty to say to the gentlemen; is indispensable in a ball-room, as he is a first-rate, indefatigable dancer, and talks more amusing nonsense than any one I ever met. And who looks for sense from a young man at a party? It would be as much out of place as my ladyship at a convocation of bishops.”

“I don’t care, she *does* flirt with him,” persisted Vermeil. “Look how she’s blushing, Mr. O’Hara, and how cross she looks; she’s always angry when I speak of her coquetting with any one before you.”

Poor Olive looked distressed as *l’enfant gâtée* ran

on, casting no thought on what she said. Seeing a bright tear standing in her sister's eye, she immediately fell into a paroxysm of penitence, being a young lady who revelled in extremes.

Though one of the most worldly women in existence in theory, Lady Montague was much too genuine, much too true to her own honest nature, to allow it to influence her practice; nevertheless, she would have been very much surprised had any one expressed such an opinion to her. She thought herself very worldly-wise, and was a thoroughly practical woman, generally, in the affairs of common, daily life; yet in the hands of her own children she was a very child. She flattered, caressed them; talked of their beauty winning coronets; their talents—heaven knows what! and would have hopelessly spoiled them had they not inherited her own true, honest nature, with the high patrician appearance of the baronet their father, with ever so many quarterings on his shield. Lady Montague informed us she had a little dinner-party that day, and was highly pleased we had arrived in time—a delight which Tom did not at all share. He had a strong objection to strangers, especially to ladies, unless very intimate with them indeed.

Among many who play no part in this drama Mrs. Fitz-Gerald and her guests were expected. Dr. and Mrs. Ireton had promised to come—a marvellous act of urbanity on his part, for he seldom visited any one. Basil had been invited, but had gone to Dhu Hall to go through the ceremony of introduction to Mr. O'Storm, in his new characters of husband and step-father. I was disappointed at his

she was glad of it; he looked so much better in his morning costume than in the dress gentlemen affect in the evening, which makes them look like unfinished waiters," which libel, as regards her son, was singularly untrue.

We had arranged our dress as best we might, and re-entered the drawing-room, when a loud knock gave token of the arrival of some of the guests. The usual bustle—whispering—pause—the door is thrown open, and Dr. and Mrs. Ireton announced. Dr. Ireton enters gravely. He is rather more stooped, and his iron-grey hair less dark than when we saw him last. He looks eminently striking, and his expression is softer than of yore. His wife enters with him, contentedly enjoying the delusion she is leaning on his arm, though she is merely reaching up to and touching it with the extreme tip of her white glove.

Past the age of wreaths and floral coronets, she wears in profusion the yellow roses she has so long and dearly loved, in her lace cap. There lies a loving remembrance, an affectionate tenderness, a world of quiet sentiment, in these outrageous flowers, which, while they evoke a smile, appeal to our best consideration. They are tokens of the first and only romance her heart has ever known. She looks upon them as a tribute to her husband, and wears them for his sake. She carries a black velvet reticule on

her arm, with gilt clasps; a little point of steel, a thread of worsted, betray its contents. I looked at her husband, half expecting to see his manuscript under his arm. The doctor—I, not being an Ireton, scarcely ever thought of him as my uncle (so great was his veneration for the name, and so little the consideration for all other names unless they had become historic)—expressed himself gratified to meet me, in his usual ponderous, undemonstrative way. He was a little nervous on our first encounter. He did not expect to see me, and my presence reminded him uncomfortably of Basil's broken engagement and, what pained him most, Philip's treachery; for, although in his pride he spoke no word of reprobation against his favourite, nay, rather, as in Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's case, defended him against his strongest convictions to the contrary, it was not *Philip* doing a wrong stung him so keenly, or that Basil suffered; it was that an Ireton should have ever forgotten his name and ancestral pride so far as to stoop to an unworthy action.

A second carriage draws up—a second loud knock—again a short delay—a rustling of skirts, and “Miss Pimply Spooney and Miss Dalmain” are announced; and Miss Pimply Spooney, alias Miss Penelope Spoonbill, looking discomfited at the unwarrantable liberty taken with her Christian name and patronymic, hesitatingly enters, followed closely by Hildred, trying to subdue an inclination to laugh. The first greetings over, Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's absence is explained and regretted. For further enlightenment Hildred hands her hostess a delicious little three-cornered note that scents the room like

him before, but had heard much about her; I must say the living reality far exceeded my most poetical imagination. Being duly introduced, Tom fell back into the remotest corner of the room and began diligently to peruse, for the nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, a volume of the once-popular "Album," although he knew every picture in it better than his own face in the glass, and could repeat, off by heart, all its extremely original compositions in due order and sequence. I could see his honest eyes steal frequently and furtively towards Hildred; and if by any accident hers were turned towards him at these times, he was immediately covered with manifest confusion. There are a few more arrivals, then an uncomfortable delay, no one knows why, but during which every one, trying to look pleased, misses the intended expression and appears amiably miserable. A spasmodic conversation is carried on in a subdued voice and low whispers such as precede a funeral. The weather, as a subject, is at a premium, and as many changes are rung upon it as if it were quite a new discovery, dug up like the fossil remains of the Mammoth, Mastodon, Megatherium, Ichthyosaurus, or Plesiosaurus—something that existed long ago and in the present condition of the world, could not possibly exist again, but the most was to be made of it while the discovery was new.

I wonder what they converse about in the planets before dinner, or how they inaugurate their small-talk at a morning visit. A thundering knock, as if the demand of entering made by the Lord Mayor and the whole Corporation had been compressed into one imperious summons; and Mr. Hector O'Grady, barrister-at-law, most unexceptionably dressed, glides smilingly into the room.

"How do, Lady Montague? Late, eh? Million apologies; but the fact is"—the counsellor invariably appealed to fact when about to deal in fiction—"coming along, capital time, was hailed by Lord O'Dunder. 'O'Grady,' says he, 'you're booked at my house for the shooting-season. Lady O'Dunder positively declares—can't do without you.' Eh? Fine old man his lordship—charming wife—young, fascinating, and all the rest of it. Escaped from his lordship—met Viscount Blunder—capital fellow—always in difficulties—wished meto—eh? Confidential—very. How do, Miss Montague? Delighted; you look—eh? Charming, positively, yes; and all the rest of it."

Now, though Olive may have looked perfectly charming, she certainly did not appear particularly charmed by the counsellor's address. It may have been Vermeil's remarks had annoyed her, or startled her inner consciousness, for she received O'Grady's compliments with a studied reserve that would have abashed any less confident courtier than himself. Strong in his faith in his irresistible attractions, and secure in his power to please, he rattled on till he rattled himself into the neighbourhood of Hildred and the delectable Penelope, by whom she sat.

entertaining difficult people, who otherwise would be left helplessly on her hands.

“Miss Spoonbill.”

The counsellor was a man of the world, and prided himself as such; consequently he regulated his introductory bow to the social status of the introduced. He had as many variations of it as Touchstone had of “if.” The bow obsequious to the peer—the bow deferential to the bishop or judge—the bow fascinating to beauty—the bow friendly to untitled wealth—the bow careless to his equal—the cut direct to his inferior, which, not being a bow at all, but rather the absence of one—would not have been mentioned in this place, only that it gives a little further insight of his character.

Now Spoonbill, however uncommon or select, was by no means an aristocratic name; neither (so far as he was aware) did it grace a bishop or judge; nor was it one he recognized as having heard among the lords of wealth; nor was her appearance in favour of the most romantic supposition that she could possibly belong to any of these; nor did her dress (in which she affected extreme lowness above and shortness below, combined with a juvenile skimpiness) betray any affinity to the latter; so the counsellor, seeing with his worldly eyes that no possible advantage, honour, or credit is to be gained by the introduction, eyes her askance, and nods in

his most indifferent manner. The amiable Spoonbill, partly appreciating his action, grows privately resentful, but in a mild, unobtrusive manner, whose only expression is a dull stare from her small green eyes, and a prolonged "H—m!"

"Miss Dalmain."

The name was high-sounding; were there not Dal mains of this place and Dal mains of that place, connected with high, proud titles and broad and swelling lands? and was she not young and, above all, beautiful? and, above all that again, exquisitely dressed—with pearls braided in her flowing hair—pearls round her neck, whose whiteness shamed them—pearls on the stomacher, with diamonds sparkling amid their soft lustre like fireflies—pearls on the smooth, rounded arms? So the counsellor bowed the obsequious-fascinating (a special reservation for high-born beauty), and forthwith whispered such (I presume) palpable compliments into her white ears, that she laughed, then blushed, and, at last, became a little dignified, beautiful in every change, looking straight past him as if his speech was not addressed to her particularly, or so slight as hardly to require recognition. Dinner was announced. The partners being duly paired, as in a country dance or soldiers on drill, off the army marched, with grave dignity mingled with a sense of relief, to do execution and wage the war of extermination on the delicate viands and costly wines. Lady Montague and the doctor, falling to the rear to see the army deploy, soon followed close upon the heels of the Spoonbill, who had taken under her protection a very small young man, with an old



ment of their choice wines, politics, and select anecdotes.

I am not antiquarian or historian sufficiently erudite to know whether the foregoing custom is a relic of ancient barbarism, or an offshoot of comparatively modern discourtesy. Whichever it may be, or from whatever cause this separation may have arisen, I hold it to be a custom which would be "more honoured in the breach than the observance." Miss Spoonbill, having proved and found her meek partner wanting—having by questions and cross-questions put him through a mental degree of torture, to which thumbscrews and iron boots would be a mere joke—getting nothing from him beyond a weak "yes" or faint "no," generally put in the wrong place and reversed—and, above all, seeing others having the appearance of enjoying themselves, becomes viciously inclined and more and more resentful. Observing Hildred looking pleased, she longs to tell her that her hair is out of order; seeing her evidently admired, that she is too pale, and dressed unbecomingly.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### MRS. FITZ-GERALD MAKES HER PEACE.

HILDRED and Olive are seated together side by side, and arm in arm, apparently sworn friends for life, though they had only met a few days previously. With all their charming innocence of look and pose, they have closely examined each other, noted every fold in each other's dress, every wave in each other's hair—in short, every detail of each other's person. Olive is in white silk and lily of the valley. The green leaves and bell-like blossoms show well against her rich brown hair.

Tom enters shyly, and, taking up his station near the door, looks around for Hildred. His eyes look his admiration; they are brimming over with it. I see it as I enter, followed by "the gentlemen." I smile at him, and his consciousness interprets my smile aright, and he becomes confused and blushes as if caught in some guilty act. We all (the barbarians, I mean, who held possession of the dinner-table after the fluttering retreat of the ladies), in a blissful state of satisfaction and contentment, begin inanely to accuse the ladies of deserting us, and try to make the *amende honorable* for our bad taste by

casting the blame upon them. There is another knock, which passes unnoticed in the confusion of tongues; the door is thrown open, and Mrs. Fitz-Gerald flutters in, bedight in dazzling colours, but all so harmoniously blended, so exquisite in their effect, she looks like some large species of humming-bird with the sun-glint of the radiant tropics still shimmering upon its wings. Tom, utterly routed from his post of observation by this new and brilliant enemy, takes refuge in his favourite corner, and incontinentally falls to perusing the aforementioned "Album" with laudable pertinacity.

But vain are his hopes to pass unnoticed, for his mother has taken forcible possession of his person, bent on introducing him to the late arrival. Tom, with a comic kind of despair very real to himself, yields, and finds himself in the presence of an embodied rainbow. The words are spoken; Tom blushes and bows, but his eyes rest not for long on the fairy-like little being before him, but wander away to Hildred with a half-anxious, half-shamed expression. He is wondering whether she thought him a big, awkward fellow, or what, when she last looked towards him; but Hildred is not thinking of him at all. She and Olive are listening to the eloquent counsellor, as if there was no such person as Tom Dorian in the world. Says Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, holding out her tiny hand with a pleasant smile, "I have heard so much of Mr. Dorian I almost look upon him as an old friend." Tom has taken her proffered hand, shaken it, and as she allows it to rest on his broad palm as a white seal upon their friendship, he holds it loosely in his grasp, either

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would you ever hear him say in love with him  
yourself."

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald smiled, but rather shyly. Why should she feel shy?

Tom laughed uneasily, and glanced towards Hildred, wondering whether she had overheard this very partial witness in his favour, and hoping she had not *quite* caught all, for he did not relish the idea of being called a "delightful goose" and an "old boy" in her hearing. Now, this was odd, for he had rather liked it than otherwise on all former occasions.

I asked Dr. Ireton how his book was progressing. He was still engaged on it, but thought of rewriting it, having discovered, by further research, that his theories did not fit in with facts, and could not, in any manner, be induced to do so, let him reason ever so hard. So his life-work—the occupation of his later life at least—had all to be altered, because he steadfastly adhered to preconceived ideas rather than reasons based on research and deduced by long thinking. I thought there was something great in this candid confession of error—something inexpressibly sad. I had always, in common, I believe, with his intimate friends, regarded his labour as a task that never was to be completed, or even, if finished, would never have been a success either in a popular or a scientific sense. I looked upon it as a hobby intended to amuse the hour, but nothing more. I

saw it was a real life-work with him ; and now, so late, to find his reality a grand mistake, because grounded on untruth, made me feel more absolute pity for his disappointment than I think he even realized to himself.

My aunt was sitting a little apart from him, knitting as briskly as ever. In honour of the occasion, moreover, she had adopted some bright colour in her wool in lieu of the usual grey.

I asked her when she had seen Philip.

"Not for some time," she returned, knitting hurriedly. "He has been 'doing'—why do people talk of travelling for pleasure as if they were cooks?—the West Coast. We received a letter from him this morning ; he mentioned he was returning direct to Italy for a year."


"Did he not acquaint his uncle of his intentions before starting?" I inquired.

"No, my dear, but I think he ought to have done so," nodding notes of admiration between each sentence. "But, you know, we have seen very little of him of late ; very little since that unhappy time—you understand. That niece of mine—she'll never die in her bed, my dear ; but I'm sure I hope she may. I saw it all the time ; but as the doctor did *not* see it—he's *so* clever, you know—I thought I must be wrong, so held my tongue. I never said to *him*," nodding towards her husband, "I saw it ; he might have thought I wished to appear wiser than him. The subject never was mentioned between us, even at the first ; but, although more than two years have passed, he feels it, my dear, I can see that. He thinks of it—broods over it. If he would only speak his mind to

tear stole down her homely cheek. I felt my abstracted uncle, through all the long years of the past, had never truly recognized the affection of his wife, never appreciated her at her true worth. "And that, my dear," she continued, after a slight pause, brightening a little, and speaking with strong conviction, "depend upon it, has upset his book, and nothing else. When an Ireton went wrong, he thought all the world had gone wrong, and, of course, his book into the bargain. But I'm sure it was all true as—as—there were O'Shaughnessies in the time of Daniel and the twelve minor Prophets."

The unspeakable triumph in which she uttered this one grand original conviction of her life without fear of contradiction (the doctor was talking to Lady Montague) was worth any money to see and hear.

I took a vacant seat beside Olive. I have already said she was very, *very* fair, and the heightened colour and pretty displeasure with which she received me made her look more captivating still. She reproached me playfully for not coming to speak to her sooner. We were old friends. Being from my childhood an especial favourite with Lady Montague, I had spent many pleasant weeks beneath her roof, during my various holidays, in the wilds of Yorkshire, in the lifetime of Sir William, so Olive and I were thrown together as companions, Vermeil being some five or six years younger than



her sister. She—Olive I mean—had slighted me, quarrelled with me, tyrannized over me, coaxed me, petted me, and betrayed me into good temper, putting to flight all my manly resolutions never to be friends “if she ever did so again.” Of course she did so again and again, and always with the same result. It ever has been and still is one of my weaknesses never to be able to nurse wrathful feelings against penitence, sometimes even when I suspected it to be feigned.

“You were so deeply engaged with Mr. O’Grady, when I remembered Vermeil’s hint, I had not the heart to interrupt you,” I replied in answer to her playful reproof. She looked at me reproachfully, and turned away with quivering lips, but made no reply. In excessive consternation at the unlooked-for result of my *badinage*, I, in such words and tones as the circumstances in which we were placed admitted of, “entreated her to pardon my nonsense—I might have known before the subject was distasteful to her,” &c., &c. She forgave me with a happy smile, and charged me “as I valued her—regard—never to jest on so serious a subject again; she could forgive others—but me—” But why I especially was not to be forgiven I was never told. Possessing the character of one always very much in earnest in what he said or did, might have had something to do with it. I know I thought so at the time, and thought, too, how very proud a man might be who could win so fair and gentle a girl for his wife. Then my thoughts glided off to my first love: again I was standing before the old cross in the Coliseum, moonlight around me and



prettier than ever. My eyes wandered to Tom. Certainly the widow had drawn *him* out wonderfully. They appeared to have changed characters; he was animated and earnest (but the last he generally was), and she was silently listening to him with downcast eyes, and softly beating her rosebud lips with the plumes of her Indian fan. Her manner was so subdued, it was quite foreign to her usual bearing. I saw his truant eyes wandering to Hildred who was dancing with the counsellor, he having got up an impromptu waltz. The young man with weak eyes, in the desperate hope of escaping from the thralldom of the fair Spoonbill, whom he dreaded taking forcible possession of his person, in a fit of the merest insanity had besought Vermeil to honour him with her hand. She, nothing loth, complied. Holding her feebly by the waist, he was soon dragging her round in endless gyrations—his head thrown back, and eyes contemplating the ceiling in speechless ecstasy; his erratic legs performing a variety of fantastic tricks, over which his limited power of body and more limited power of will had no control. His poor little head forsook him, and the next instant he was lying helpless on the carpet, fortunately failing to drag his partner with him, lacking weight and purchase to accomplish so undesirable a catastrophe.

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Miss Spoonbill was observed to smile grimly, triumphing in the fall of her forgetful swain. I really think she looked upon his accident as an especial intervention of Providence, to punish him for deserting her when she had so resolutely endeavoured to chain him to her side. Covered with confusion, the young man arose and shrank back into his former seat, yielding himself a prey to Penelope and despair. With much consideration and kind feeling she informed him "how painfully ridiculous he looked lying on the floor, and how every one laughed at him, though they took good care not to let him see it—which was a perfectly original conception of her own—she wondered how—hem!—any lady could be so—hem!—indelicate"—she shuddered at the word—"as to allow a gentleman's—hem!—coat-sleeve to encircle her—hem!—sash. She was not a prude, nor straight-laced." It was very good of her to tell him so, for she not only looked remarkably straight-laced but remarkably tight-laced into the bargain. "She thought it wore the delicate bloom off the cheek of virtue, to so far—hem!—remove the barrier civilization and—hem!—propriety had erected between the conflicting sexes. Hem!" Here, overcome by her powerful rhetoric, the excellent young man fainted. We men were driven to the very verge of distraction by envy, for all the ladies, like so many beautiful sisters of charity in masquerade, gathered round him, deluging him with rose-water, Eau de Cologne—bathing his temples with their delicate handkerchiefs, and fanning him with their fans, till there was quite a little tempest of sweet airs around him. But Lady

follow a fox across the country, but the third turn in a waltz upsets him. So a quadrille is proposed, and Lady Montague presses the doctor into her service, and claims him as her partner. He, with secret unwillingness, complies; but he is much too gentlemanlike to show his disinclination, or refuse to obey the commands of a lady.

This was the first occasion on which he had met Mrs. Fitz-Gerald since their memorable *tête-à-tête* supper of oysters and champagne. To gain his place in the quadrille he has to pass close by her, where she stands with Tom awaiting their *vis-à-vis*. The doctor, looking very grave, bows profoundly. The lady sweeps the very carpet in the depth of her humility, and slowly rises with infinite grace. Her merry voice rippling into laughter, she advances to meet her adversary with extended hand, and he, enchanted with her grace and frankness, takes the proffered offering and presses it to his lips with all the gallantry of his young days. And peace is sealed between them for ever and ever.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE RESULT OF MISS SPOONBILL'S LECTURE ON SELF-RESTRAINT.

Two years passed away, during which period no intelligence of or from her father had reached Hildred's ears. If she ever thinks of him, wondering where he is—in what land—how living, or what may be his fate, she never speaks of him, never refers to the past, or mentions his name. She never dreams of his coming to claim her. She was so utterly unnoticed, uncared for by him in the wretched years they passed together, she feels she must be an object of indifference to him still, if he even thinks of her, and prays that they may never, never meet on this side the grave, unless his life is changed. Had she wealth she would give him gold to save him from crime; had she power she would wield it to save him from shame, and reinstate him in his former rank; but her mother's grave has opened a gulf between them nothing can ever bridge over.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald has removed to Merrion Square, and the radiant Penelope is still her guest. Having been invited "to make her house her home," she has done so to the fullest extent, made it very much her

reflection upon herself, consequently, she still views Hildred with strong disfavour; she considers it her special mission to "keep down" her "vanity," and "lessen her self-esteem," so is always making disparaging remarks, which Hildred only laughs at; for when her mirror, or admiring eyes have told a woman she is beautiful, could the tongue of an angel persuade her to the contrary?—no!

The young girl knows she is fair, and rejoices in the knowledge; yet, except by Penelope, she had never been accused of vanity, though many declared her to be proud.

Lady Montague has gone to her estates in Yorkshire. She fancied Olive was looking pale, and has secret misgivings. The counsellor, for some time past, had been obtrusively (as she thought) attentive, and very frequent in his visits, and Olive had grown thoughtful, expressed a dislike to shopping—that dear delight of idleness—and gave up practising on the piano, lute, harp, dulcimer, and sacbut; took kindly to poetry, and was once discovered gazing on the pensive moon. Very dangerous indications of an affected heart; so Lady Montague quietly determined to remove her out of the magic circle of Mr. O'Grady's attractions. She knew well—dislike the match as she might—her only safety was in flight before Olive's attachment became hopelessly con-

firmed. If she once loved and pleaded her own cause, her ladyship felt she was irrevocably lost; that the struggle between her duty and the desire to gratify her darling child would be unequally contested; with Olive's tears and her own tenderness pleading on the same side, the voice of poor worldly wisdom, alias duty, would never be heard at all.

But Olive thought not of the counsellor, nor did the counsellor, in the light of a lover, think of her. He liked to be seen with her riding in the Park—at the theatre—to dance with her at balls, and have her name generally associated with his by the "bloods" and "spirits" of the day. She is popular, pretty, and high-born; the intimacy confers on him a certain distinction, and he has the intense satisfaction of feeling that his dear friends and associates could (to speak poetically) cut their own throats, and his also for the matter of that, with downright envy. Tom Dorian has surprised his friends by "running up" to Dublin frequently during the past year. He has not ventured to call on Mrs. Fitz-Gerald. He has met her several times in the streets, quite accidentally of course (these accidents occur so frequently, they have a strong suspicion of design about them), and she has never invited him to visit her, which is strange, knowing what friends the families were; but she always seems pleased to see him, and is strangely quiet when they shake hands and part. Miss Penelope Spoonbill enacts the *rôle* of dragon on these occasions, with great effect. Tom is rather frightened of her; she looks so very like a viper, with her small, green, unfringed eyes, and lipless mouth. He finds himself wondering is her

opportunity arrives ; so it passes, and on the subject nearest to his heart he is still speechless. One day when lounging alone in the Park, without any purpose, of course (he had seen a lady ride from Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's door some hours before, attended by a groom), when a fair equestrian drew near to where he stood. With beating heart he meditated flight, but, scorning himself for his weakness, irresolutely maintained his ground. The rider very lovely, with hair gleaming like gold in the flashing sunlight, approaches, accompanied by a gentleman whom he does not particularly notice ; she looks at him casually, and, as he is about to raise his hat, turns away, mistaking the true meaning of the action. She passes on carelessly, thinking she has seen his face before, but does not remember where, probably among the idlers in the Park ; meeting him frequently, she supposes, has rendered his face familiar to her, so she dismisses him from her thoughts and laughs merrily in reply to some remark of her companion, puts her horse into a canter, and soon vanishes out of sight.

Tom leaves Dublin by the night mail, bound for Dorian Hall.

Penelope sedulously pursued the scheme of educa-

tion she had devised for Hildred's benefit; at least, she affirmed it was so undertaken. In doing so, she made it an especial point of ignoring the fact of her pupil's increasing years, and resolutely persevered in regarding her as a mere child. Hildred tried to cloak her contemptuous indifference for her teacher beneath a show of deference out of love for Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, although it cost her a hard struggle. Surely she was endeavouring to learn self-repression, but by other means than those her preceptress prescribed.

One day, it was a bright afternoon in the middle of summer, teacher and scholar were seated in a cheery room tastefully decorated, and particularly dedicated to their use and service.

Hildred was more than usually inattentive to the ethical lecture, indiscriminately blended with religion, of Miss Spoonbill, who, seeing the pupil longing to be free and away, charitably prolonged the discourse.

The window was open, and with the gay sunlight and balmy air streamed in pleasant sounds of spirit-stirring music, mingled with faint echoes of laughter and the gleesome shouts of children at play. Gay crowds were promenading in the square, she could see them from where she sat, half-concealed by the crimson curtains.

She listened intently to the hoof-fall of every passing horse, hoping it would stop before the hall-door. She longed to look out of the open window, over sill and all, although she knew Miss Penelope would immediately liken her to Jezebel, for Basil had promised to take her a long ride, and she had



Dalmain, fail to enforce—hem !—your attention ; if the sacredness of the subject I—hem !—am humbly—hem !—attempting to illuminate—hem !—wins not the regard of your extremely unregenerate—hem !—hem !—and *hopelessly sinful heart*” (with tremendous emphasis), “gratitude to your benefactress—hem !—might make you *appear* anxious at least—hem !—to gratify her, by seconding—hem !—my unworthy efforts—hem !—to improve your sadly—I must say sadly—hem !—I might add deplorably—hem !—defective knowledge of all important subjects—hem !—”

“It is time to go and dress ; Mr. Ireton will be here soon, it would not be right to keep him waiting,” returned Hildred carelessly, rising as she spoke.

“Hem !—I have not yet concluded—hem !—my dissertation,” she said dryly, perceiving Hildred about to leave the room.

“Pardon me, your hour is up ; it is now *my* time, I do not wish to detain Mr. Ireton at the door.”

“It wants three minutes and three quarters yet,” said Miss Penelope consulting her enamelled watch. Hildred resumed her seat with a listless air, assumed to conceal her chagrin.

“I am not sure—hem !—that punctuality on a lady’s part—hem !—in keeping an assignation—hem !—” (a shudder of delicate horror), “with a gentleman—hem !—is desirable. It betrays too great

an anxiety, in short, a—a pleasure—hem!—in meeting with one of the conflicting sex repulsively unfeminine.” She appeared inclined to faint, but didn't do it.

“Mr. Basil Ireton is an old friend,” said Hildred with forced composure.

“An *old* friend,” repeated Penelope, dwelling on the adjective as if it were a word of three syllables beginning with three o's separated with a —. “An o—o—old friend!—hem!—the man is twenty-three or four, and you, though an infant—hem!—in understanding, are seventeen at least.” This was the first time she had ever acknowledged Hildred's actual age. “Very old friends, indeed; and at a remarkably prudent age—hem! Only I have ceased to wonder at anything since I consented to live in Ireland, I may say I wonder at *you*.”

“Oh! I only used the term relatively; of course, the expression as applied in any other manner to me, must, to one of your experience, seem ridiculous. Ah! if you formed any friendships in your youth, they must be *very* old indeed. How strange you never married! What a pretty waltz the band is playing, I suppose *that* is an innovation since your dancing days.”

She stood before the window beating time to the music. Penelope's eyelids and mouth twitched nervously; she was too much disconcerted to reply at once. Then in a constrained voice, “We are wasting precious time; your benefactress—”

When the amiable Spoonbill was irate or desired to be peculiarly disagreeable, she invariably alluded to her pupil's dependent state (which she had some-

how managed to ferret out), and coarsely appealed to her gratitude.

“*Our* benefactress!” interrupted Hildred with emphasis. “Our obligations, Miss Spoonbill, to Mrs. Fitz-Gerald are, I fancy, mutual.”

“Hem!—pardon me, Miss Dalmain,” returned the offended spinster, her eyes receding in their collets and her complexion becoming several shades greener in her symptoms of wrath. “You must be aware I am too independent of the world to be compelled—hem!—to endure what you term obligations. My residence with my charming, but too thoughtless widowed relative, is simply an act of kindness, a sacrifice I might say, on my part—hem!—conferring a favour, rather than having a favour conferred. I am no Lazarus begging for crumbs, and purple and fine linen,” she concluded loftily.

“Miss Spoonbill’s sweetness and affability, her grace and benignity, joined to the extreme correctness of her ideas, render her an acquisition to any domestic circle which her presence adorns; even if her slight income (my jewels, all loving gifts, are worth more) was not the result of a codicil invented through extreme delicacy by our mutual friend, to whom we both owe so much. It is fortunate you can only touch the interest, not the principal; for, if again you yielded to the seductions of an elderly itinerant preacher too rashly for your worldly prosperity, what *would* become of you? I wonder could I ever act so foolishly as to fall in love with a dishonest, rusty old individual in black, at your age.” There was a mischievous, laughing light in her brilliant eyes, though she assumed an air of perfect

simplicity. For some minutes her antagonist was absolutely silenced. Dull rage, surprise, mortification, rendered her powerless. The allusion to the codicil she could not comprehend, but the "itinerant preacher," the "rusty old individual in black," were palpable hits. Her voice grew harsher as she replied,—

"Hem!—I am at a loss to comprehend Miss Dalmain's unladylike allusions; I know nothing of codicils."

"Nor of preachers?" inquired Hildred mildly.

This question was ignored.

"Had I been cast—" she began viciously.

"Perhaps," cried Hildred, anticipating a tirade about gratitude, "the report of the foolish—I mean, unhappy manner in which your fortune was so cruelly run away with, and your confidence betrayed, was not altogether correct. Do tell it me—quite a romance of real life, and delightfully interesting."

She was merciless,—all women are in their triumphs, be they over a rebellious husband, an humbled lover, or (dearest of all) an offending sister.

She had hitherto submitted to Miss Penelope's petty tyrannies, taming down her pride and passion by constant endeavour, though the struggle with her nature was sometimes long and severe. This was the first time she had ever retaliated, and she was determined to make her rebellion signal. But she mistook discomfiture for victory, and not estimating sufficiently the enemy's forces in reserve, met with a decided repulse.

Miss Penelope felt compelled to make some reply.

the icy paths of rigorous reserve—hem!—but late experience—”

“True; we are never too old to learn,” commented Hildred.

“Were I cast,” suddenly deviating from the point in question; “I say, were I cast”—she paused, seeking for some expression forcible enough to ease her burdened mind—“a very—Diogenes at the knocker and bell of a bloated Alexander—”

“Ha! ha!” laughed Hildred, still revelling in her triumph; “meaning me as Diogenes, and Mrs. Fitz-Gerald as the bloated Alexander. What a delicious compliment; how delightfully illustrative!”

“I should have found,” continued Miss Spoonbill, heedless of the interruption, “I should have found the waves of my thankfulness—hem!—too—too—hem!—coercive to—obliterate the landmarks and shoals—” Here the eloquent spider became hopelessly meshed in the web of her own oratory.

“Proceed,” said Hildred mischievously.

“I—I—if I—hem!—unhappily listened too trustingly to the voice of a syren in gentlemanlike habiliments, I thank Heaven I never was proud of my beauty.”

“What a superfluity of gratitude!” And the golden-tressed maiden, in the pride of her loveliness, moved a large mirror, placing its reflector in a position so as to reproduce the persons of both

speakers at the same time, then looking in it for a moment, resumed her seat.

“ Was never proud of my beauty,” repeated the exasperated spinster ; “ never used meretricious arts to set it off—never condescended to make myself pleasant.” (“ Indeed,” from Hildred, parenthetically.) “ Nor rode, nor flirted, nor ran after, nor pursued, nor sang duets in barbarous tongues the singers themselves don’t understand ; no, I never condescended to all this, to please any of the conflicting sex—hem !—never threw my head as *some* have done ” (looking significantly at Hildred), “ at any dreadful, antagonistic creature, more especially at one so—so contemptible—hem !—so pretentious, so conceited, as that horrid, self-sufficient, disagreeable, abominable Mr. Basil Ireton. Hem ! ”

Hildred flushed passionate crimson up to her very hair. Her neck and throat were dyed with blushes. Hot tears flashed in her indignant eyes, but she made no reply, though the heaving chest on which her hand was pressed as if to keep down its angry swelling, betrayed the excitement under which she chafed.

Penelope’s green eyes gleamed with triumph in return.

“ If I affected beauty—hem !—or aped grace or elegance foreign to my figure, or laid claim—hem !—to sharpness, mistaking rudeness for wit, thank Heaven ! I’m not guilty of any of these.” Miss Penelope always made it a point of thanking Heaven for everything, with remarkable fervency, when out of temper. “ I would be more ambitious than to throw myself, unasked and unsought, at the feet of

I a man, and you a man, I would tell you that you lied. What do you, with your cold, treacherous heart, and false lips, know of honour, truth, gratitude, or affection? I tell you this, were you and the most loathsome reptile that ever crawled the earth, placed at my mercy, powerless, beneath my feet, and I compelled to crush one, I'd tread upon you, and let the less hateful creature pass."

Hours, days, weeks, months, silent years of slight, indignity, and mean oppression, all clamoured for vindication as she spoke. "I never," she continued vehemently, "you know I never—" Maiden shame restrained the indignant denial that burnt upon her lips. It seemed a sort of disgrace even to repel the accusation. "He is noble, and true and good; has been to me all a father, friend, a brother could be; and as such I respect and esteem him, much as I hate and despise you."

"Hem!—how maidenlike!—how Christian-like! Quite a moral study, upon my word, quite a moral study," spasmodically ejaculated her antagonist, with a ghastly attempt at laughter. "Hem!"

"If to be a Christian is to resemble you in anything, I pray Heaven I may die an infidel," retorted the enraged girl.

"Your prayer will be answered, no doubt. I shall inform your deluded patroness of this unseemly exhibition. Would she were present! It might

lessen her infatuation—hem!—but I'll do my duty and inform her; also of the manners you get on with—”

“There will be no necessity, Miss Spoonbill, to pain yourself so far,” said a sweet voice, in whose tone there was a severity, impressive from its very rarity. “There will be no necessity.” And Mrs. Fitz-Gerald was seen standing on the threshold of the unclosed door. She came gravely into the room; Hildred flew towards her, and throwing herself into her arms, burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

“I have been a silent witness to this scene, have formed my own judgment,” she pursued with calm dignity, “so trust I may be spared unwelcome comments or futile extenuation. I am sorry this has happened, but sorrow cannot remedy a past error. I am sorry, too, Miss Spoonbill, you should have so far forgotten your better nature or prudence, as to speak slightly of one I so deeply respect as Mr. Basil Ireton, and in the presence of one who has all right to regard him with a sister's affection. It was a gratuitous unkindness, an unpardonable want of thought. Gratitude is too rare a quality, in this forgetful world of ours, not to be fostered and respected. And I am doubly grieved that you, Hildred—don't weep, darling—should be so far forgetful of Miss Spoonbill's age, her relationship to one I esteemed so deeply, and whose memory is sacred, as to forego the respect no less due to her than to yourself.”

“She—she,” sobbed Hildred. The admonitory “hush” of prohibition was unnecessary, for tears choked her utterance.



common equity, be attributed to me—hem ! ”

Crossing, or rather resting her lank arms one upon the other, she smiled grimly, in the pleasing consciousness of having uttered something cutting.

“The only injustice I am aware of lies in Miss Spoonbill’s remark ; but I know her accusation is rather the offspring of her present frame of mind than her convictions, therefore pardon it.” And she turned away, as if to dismiss the subject.

But Penelope was pertinacious. She had conquered one enemy so far as to force from her unwilling eyes hot, burning tears, what a double triumph to make the little widow feel her power. She, with all her light-heartedness and genial mirth, ever kept her (Miss Spoonbill) in awe. But her amiable hope was, happily for herself, frustrated ; though had she succeeded in arousing her best friend’s indignation, and offended her beyond all reconciliation, it would have been better for that unsuspecting friend, better, a thousand times, for the beautiful Hildred.

“My frame of mind, thank Heaven ! ” said Miss Penelope piously, “is above any convictions. What is the use of convictions when I have scattered the seed of my precious experience on the barren desert, and the lions of the forest have devoured it—hem ! —encouraged by the shepherdess who ought to have

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been its safeguard," concluded the fair speaker, rather misty as to her own meaning.

"You must now see," said Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, ignoring the speaker's eloquence, and passing by her confusion of images without a smile, "and confess how sadly your scheme of forming the mind has failed. Injudicious correction frequently confirms the very failings we wish to amend. I never quite approved of it, but, certainly until now, never knew how much—both perhaps—had sometimes to bear."

"Hem!" with resignation.

"I had hoped the experiment might have been of advantage, not alone to Hildred but to you."

"Hem!" with surprise.

"That the loving disposition—"

"Hem!" with irony.

"The tenderness, and, I may add, beauty of the scholar."

"Hem!" with indignation.

"Might have awakened some corresponding, some lovable chord in the heart of the teacher."

"Hem!" with wrath. "Had I been aware." She was perfectly aware, "how—hem!—highly, I may say how very highly you both appreciate that—very peculiar Mr. Basil Ireton—"

"Who is very proud of being so appreciated," exclaimed Basil, with forced gaiety, as he entered the room. "Don't blush, Miss Spoonbill, we cannot win the golden opinions of all our acquaintances," he continued, bowing slightly to the disconcerted spinster, and shaking hands warmly with Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, who felt relieved by any termination of the scene, and thankful he had heard nothing more dis-

paraging, for *then* Miss Spoonbill's sin would have lain far outside the pale of her forgiveness. "You know, Miss Spoonbill, I am a privileged person, otherwise I dare not intrude into your sanctum in search of—How's this, Hildred? No greeting for an old friend; and the horses, too, at the door, and the afternoon glorious, and you not ready?"

"I hope you will excuse," she hesitated in confusion, without looking up. Miss Spoonbill's accusation was ringing in her ears, and waking strange thoughts in her brain, that frightened her, without knowing why.

"I will excuse everything but that you should ask to be excused. Ah! I fear—pardon me, Mrs. Fitz-Gerald—I fear Miss Spoonbill has not only exceeded her limited time, but—I hope not—her just authority."

He spoke very gravely, his questioning eyes fixed on Penelope, who only responded with an indignant "Hem!" but tried to look scornfully at him, and signally failed.

"Hildred will be ready in a moment," interposed Mrs. Fitz-Gerald; "make haste, darling."

As the impulsive girl raised her head from its resting-place, she endeavoured to avoid Basil's eye; but he saw her tears and the flush of shame or passion on her beautiful face. He was about to question her eagerly when a motion from Mrs. Fitz-Gerald silenced him. She led Hildred to the door, and with many injunctions, couched in playful terms, not to keep her escort waiting, dismissed her to her toilet with a loving kiss.

Placing her fairy hand lightly on Basil's arm, she

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turned to the mortified Spoonbill, and with a winning smile informed her, "The carriage would be at the door in half an hour; she hoped she would enjoy a drive with her this beautiful day. The coachman had informed her he was going to try the new horses she had heard so much about and never seen." The adorable virgin bowed a grim assent; with a gay remark, Mrs. Fitz-Gerald led Basil from the room.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HILDRED AND BASIL.

HILDRED—from an habitual deference to Basil's wishes, as well as from a grateful desire to please him in all things—was soon dressed and ready for her promised ride. Yet why did she pause? why seek to delay? Her maid handed to her her gloves, her riding-whip. She was dismissed for a glass of water, which was barely touched when brought. She looked anxiously in the mirror to see if any traces of her late agitation were visible. Her eye was somewhat brighter, her cheek—what sudden thought makes the hot blood rush in burning tumult to that cheek, then receding leaves it white as moonlight upon marble? She has mislaid her handkerchief, she does not see it, but her attendant does, lifts it, and gives it into her hand. She is again dismissed on some trivial errand; anything for a delay. She once more consults the looking-glass, and smiles as she sees how very fair she is. It is not a smile of vanity, of conceit, of self-glorification, it is something apart from all these, for her loveliness has assumed a new value in her estimation far above what it ever possessed before, and she thinks not of herself but of

another. Her attendant has fulfilled her commission, and returns with the tidings of Basil's impatience. She takes up the glass of water, tastes it, and hastily descends. She pauses at the closed door of the room in which he stands awaiting her, pauses irresolute (when his voice meets her ear), uncertain whether to enter or retreat. Penelope's accusation has awakened a new consciousness within her. A feeling she did not attempt to analyze; a sort of pleasurable dread to which her experience could give no designation. Then the charge, so grotesquely expressed, of "throwing her head at him," rushed into her mind in all the fulness of its coarse meaning. What if he, misinterpreting her affection—no, not that—but her true, unselfish desire to please him, should think—Oh, shame! She felt she would have given worlds to have been able to refuse accompanying him that day. She would refuse. The determination became so strong she was about to seek refuge in her own room, when Mrs. Fitzgerald, wondering at her delay, came in quest of her. She had no resource left but to follow her into Basil's presence.

She was soon mounted, and rode by Basil's side the cynosure of all eyes that turned and gazed upon her as she passed along in her acknowledged loveliness, her auburn curls trembling into gold; she could not be quite unconscious of the homage of admiration tendered by all beholders, as she managed her spirited horse with exquisite grace.

Her spirits had risen and become fitful. Her companion regarded her with surprise; he had never seen her in so variable a mood before. She talked

and laughed as one who, from some secret consciousness, dreads a pause in conversation, lest some subject should be touched upon one would rather ward off for a time, if not avoid altogether.

Basil attributed her unusual excitement to the effects of her late scene with the divine and altogether excellent Spoonbill. Though ignorant of the special manner in which she had referred to their intimacy, he had heard enough to know he had been referred to in no very flattering terms. He was totally ignorant of any sin he had committed against the spinster to arouse her anger against him. He would have more freely forgiven her anything she could have spoken against himself in any other presence than Hildred's; and above all, he could not forgive her Hildred's tears. He dismissed her from his consideration, for other thoughts were at his heart pleading for utterance.

He tried to keep pace with his companion's mirth, in order to efface all disagreeable impressions the late scene may have left upon her mind; but as his spirits rose, Hildred became for some cause more and more quiet, and, finally, silent.

And Basil became silent too.

She felt his eyes were upon her. She knew he was thinking of her, but how? As a tender guardian? As she herself had said and thought, believed, perhaps (until the mystery of her own heart was laid bare by the spinster's cruel words) as a father, a brother, while she—oh, shame!

They turned their horses' heads towards where the ancient thorns (their green berries just blushing into scarlet, beneath the fervent kisses of the sun),

threw cool, emerald shadows on the sward, chequered with golden traceries.

They were alone; alone in the opaline gloom, delicious and soft as the fall of moonlight. One absorbing thought was hid in Basil's breast; one mingled hope and fear. He felt assuredly (not for the first time did the thought stir his every pulse, though he had tried to subdue and keep it down lest he should alarm her, deceive himself, and render their future intercourse impracticable)—he had thought till lately he had been simply playing the part of careful guardian to one so strangely placed under his ward, when he felt another and diviner feeling had arisen in his heart; and now he knew love was his prompter, and not self-imposed duty alone.

He was about to speak, to tell her how deeply, how truly he loved her, when her very beauty contrasted with his own ungainliness, made him pause, while the remembrance of Lucy Graham's desertion clove his brain as lightning cleaves the air. Was he again deceiving himself? He was silent. Had he spoken this story might have ended here. He loved her,—not, perhaps, with the enthusiastic infatuation he had felt for Lucy Graham, but with a deeper, tenderer, purer, truer, more exalted love: the love of the man who has suffered and conquered; not the mere yearnings of the passionate boy. He could endure this suspense, this uncertainty no longer. He would risk it. "Hildred," he said softly, his voice trembling with emotion. But Miss Spoonbill's accusation was still in her ears, jangling like discordant bells. What if *he* thought so meanly of her, so humiliatingly? so misinterpreted her



smart stroke with her riding-whip, before Basil had well syllabled her name : the startled animal bounded over the springy turf.

Basil misunderstood her action. He thought she had divined his passion, and wished to spare him the pain of a refusal. So they rode homeward together, each holding a secret in their "heart of hearts," deep, silent, unrevealed, which, if but known to either, would have thrilled them with unutterable gladness.

From this time Hildred's manner underwent a total change; she ceased even affecting courtesy towards the Spoonbill. She became more tender and thoughtful, and seemed to cling more closely to her benefactress, as if she feared a separation was at hand. She grew grave and reserved towards Basil, when they met, which was but seldom now. Yet she waited and watched, and wearied for his coming, in secret, more anxiously than ever. What though she no longer bounded to greet him with words of glad welcome and joyous smile, she listens for his voice, his very step, shrinking and reproaching herself for her want of maiden pride, yet listening all the more.

Miss Penelope Spoonbill, only she never sang, would have chaunted an especial *Te Deum*, in honour of her victory. She saw she had sown distrust between two loving hearts, and her success made her tolerant of Hildred's unstudied indifference. Ah ! if Mrs. Fitz-Gerald would only fall in

love? And she thought with great glee what a pleasant thing it would be to make her miserable also; who could twit her then with the dereliction of the Reverend Boanerges? She always, in imagination, visited Hildred's sins on the head of the widow with infinite satisfaction.

Basil noted the great change in Hildred's manner towards him. He thought she had discovered his secret heart, and wished by her marked reserve to quench the hopes it was not in her power to realize. To be in her presence, to have daily intercourse with her, to look upon her utter loveliness, was only to love her more and more. To live in sight of heaven and not to long for it was an impossible madness; so he kept away from the house in which she dwelt, only calling at rare intervals. As an excuse for his absence he pleaded study and his college duties.

During the infrequent visits he now paid he felt that absence had no power to lessen his love, nay, rather augmented it, by rendering her more precious to him when they met. Difficulty with some natures is the incentive to success; to be compelled to struggle is but to conquer in the end. In every other case in life but this one they would have been so to him; but he had been harshly taught to distrust himself, and nothing could eradicate from his mind the galling knowledge.

To be near her and never see her was an act of self-denial beyond his power to exercise—so he felt his only safety lay in flight. The more he felt how hopeless it was to win her, the more he felt he loved. He derided his folly, struggled with it, laughed it to utter scorn, and loved her all the more.

He announced his intention of visiting Dhu Hall

Basil was to travel in the morning; he would be away for months. He had given up his rooms in college, not intending to reside in town any more. Hildred's heart stood still as she listened to this unexpected intelligence, but no outward indication betrayed her great concern. As he was to start very early, he would say "good-bye" to-night. Hildred, as he took her hand, bade him "*au revoir*" with so much indifference, even Mrs. Fitz-Gerald looked up in surprised displeasure. Hildred having taken her candle—Basil lighting it for her—bade "good-night," kissing her hostess on the cheek.

"You are icy cold, my love."

"No! I am warm—quite warm," she replied, smiling; and, bowing slightly to Basil, left them. Reaching her own room, she barred her door against all intrusion, and flung herself wildly on her knees by her bedside, with a stifled cry.

Her maid knocked. There was no reply. She knocked again with no better success.

"She has undone herself," muttered the maiden, as she tripped down stairs well pleased. "I'll have an extra hour for myself—and John."

"Have you and Hildred quarrelled? or has she displeased you in any way?" inquired Mrs. Fitz-Gerald anxiously, as Basil was leaving the house.

"No," he replied smiling sadly. "No—my best and truest friend—she has merely acted in the

wisest manner. God bless you! and her too. God bless her! good-night."

"He loves her. I once fancied she—but perhaps I only thought what I hoped—I should like to see his life brightened as I think she would gladden it," murmured Mrs. Fitz-Gerald as she retired to rest that night, and inly wondered how it was the worthiest love was so often unappreciated and unrequited.

Miss Penelope Spoonbill returned home very late.

"Did you walk, miss?" asked the servant who let her in.

"Yes," she replied shortly, but with less asperity of manner than usual in her colloquy with the servants.

"The carriage was ordered to go for you, miss."

"Hem!—the night was fine—"

"And the company agreeable, miss?" Seeing something like a smile hovering around the region where her lips ought to have been, but were not, he had ventured on a joke: to his surprise he met with no reproof. But he had seen more than the resemblance of a smile; he had seen a pair of legs in broadcloth descend the steps. She, also, retired to her room, but not to rest. She sat in her easy chair, with her chin resting on her right hand, her left supporting her elbow, pondering and wondering; despite the sharp lesson of distrust she learnt some time ago, building on the ruins of her past experience fresh castles in the air.

All the next day she was very mysterious, and unusually amiable, making a great display of having some secret (to be held with life) in her keeping, and feeling very much disappointed no one appeared

love. Receiving invited to be pale and weather-looking, and guessing the cause of this change, she considerably confided to her its sad history, putting it in a light altogether new and peculiar; especially where she dwelt on Basil's despair, on the improbability of his ever forgetting his wrong, and the downright impossibility of his ever loving another.

This story being told, with injunctions of secrecy, Hildred intensely disappointed the good-natured historian by appearing more like her former self—more like, but not altogether like. She became fonder of gaiety, was never weary of excitement, seeking perpetual amusement with an unwearied pertinacity that astonished and grieved Mrs. Fitzgerald. She (the latter) tried to win, gently and lovingly, from her the secret of this change, but Hildred declared there was nothing to reveal, and laughed at her friend's anxiety; and yet, while doing this, she longed to throw herself on that friend's breast and confess her hopeless misery. Had she not heard the distorted version of her guardian's first love she would have done so, but now pride and maiden shame prevented her revealing her love for one whose heart was still another's, though that other had forsaken him. "Her husband is old," said Penelope, "he can't live long; then Basil will marry her after all."

So she had thrown away the richest offerings of her heart on one who only felt towards her as a guardian—a friend—not only that, but was only

waiting for the grave to close over the dead husband ere he claimed the woman who had betrayed him as his wife. She acknowledged her debt of gratitude—his unselfish kindness, his great tenderness, his thoughtful guardianship—if she could only have repaid him, as far as in her power, by a life's devotion, but that was *now* impossible. Her jewels—watch, chain, rings, horse, were all his gifts, all tokens of his *brotherly* affection; how bitterly she dwelt upon the word, how she loathed and hated it. Oh! how she longed to be away, to be for ever from under his care, to retribute him in some wild way for all the past; and then—then what? she hardly knew—dare hardly think.

Some time after this (that is, Basil's departure for Dhu Hall), her father appeared in Dublin. He called on Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, was struck with the beauty of his daughter, regarding it somewhat in the same light as Sir Giles Overreach looked upon that of *his* daughter, a marketable commodity worth so much of wealth and rank in return.

Sir John claimed his daughter, bestowing upon her an amount of affection altogether extraordinary, seeing he had been content to live without her for so many years, and never once seek to inquire after her well-being.

Hildred (still seeing a grave open between her and her father, and her mother's dead face warning her) told him she would accompany him. It was an escape from her intolerable position—any escape was merciful from the man she loved, to whom she owed so much, and who had everything but love to offer in return.

Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, grieved and disappointed, wished

urged her father to leave Dublin at once. He was her natural, her legal guardian; so packing up all her jewellery (his gifts), save one small cross, and inscribing on the package the legend, "with Hildred's gratitude," she left Mrs. Fitz-Gerald's roof, never to stand beneath its hospitable shelter again.

On receiving the intelligence, Basil hurried up to Dublin, but Sir John with his daughter had sailed for England.

On what small pivots the grand *événements* of life oft turn. In many of the complications around us, a word spoken—an act timely performed—would cut in twain the gordian knot it takes years to untie, unless, mayhap, wearied in the struggle, we lie down and die, leaving it unresolved; but the word we long to speak, or long to hear, is never spoken; the act we long to do, or long to see done, is never accomplished; and so, as I said, wearied with the struggle, we lie down and die, leaving it unresolved. Had Basil spoken to Hildred when the words were trembling on his lips—had Hildred confessed the dearest secret of her heart when urged by Mrs. Fitz-Gerald! But this is vain speculation; we know what "is," but can only uselessly speculate on what "might have been."

Miss Spoonbill very properly regarded Hildred's departure as the result of her stratagems, and rejoiced accordingly. Hildred wrote frequently to her late friend—letters filled with love and gratitude—but never gave any address, honestly adding her

father strictly prohibited her doing so. They (Sir John and his daughter) seemed to be leading a Bohemian sort of life, two consecutive letters seldom bearing the same post-mark—London, Paris, Baden-Baden, Madrid, Vienna, St. Petersburg, all appear to have been visited in turn. Of late her letters had become infrequent, and were tinged with an unaccountable sadness—then they ceased altogether.

And how was Sir John made aware of his daughter's residence? What had induced him to seek her?

He had accidentally seen Lady Montague, with her daughters, on a race-course. Having learned she was Irish, wealthy, and a widow, he had managed to secure an introduction. Struck by the similarity of the names, she had casually asked him was he any connexion of Miss Dalmain who lived with Mrs. Fitz-Gerald. The baronet had never heard of Mrs. Fitz-Gerald, so denied the relationship. However, he asked the lady's Christian name; heard it was Hildred, and managed to find out that Mrs. Fitz-Gerald was Basil Ireton's particular friend; gleaning, with much caution, that Hildred was extremely beautiful and under the guardianship of wealthy friends, his fatherly affection became demonstrative; he acknowledged the relationship, and resolved to discover his beloved child. He succeeded easily, and called on Mrs. Fitz-Gerald; he would have partaken of her hospitality for many days to come, had not Hildred resolutely declared their flight must be at once or never.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

I THINK I stated some chapters back that this veritable history, was not only written long after many of its chief actors had departed, and the curtain fallen on the last act of the eventful drama of their several lives ; but, also, not altogether from personal observation. Some parts were compiled from what I have heard at different periods, from different persons (each of whom had been eye-witnesses of the particular events they attempted to describe), and others collated from letters and other documents submitted to my inspection for the express purpose to which they have been applied. And so, when I speak of scenes in which I not only bore no part (as in the last chapter), but was miles away during their performance ; when I appear to be supplying motives of action of which I, presumably, could know nothing, and deduce inferences from any peculiar line of conduct, when the mind of the performer could not, it would seem, be laid bare before me,—I am not, as might be supposed, merely drawing on my imagination, or supplying supposititious material to fill a chapter, or round off and complete an other-

wise imperfect whole ; but simply compiling from materials given as described a few lines back. It seems to me necessary to mention this particularly, as part of the history I am now about to enter upon (only a small, but yet important item) was not made known to me for some time after its completion.

Lord Rathmore is still an invalid, but more captious, more exacting, more irritating than ever ; still believing, or feigning to believe, in his wife's unalterable affection ; still treating her with a sarcastic sort of courtesy infinitely more galling than downright, open rudeness, which one might meet and repel ; still secretly (as he opines) watchful, suspicious, and fearing his wife, though he can give, even to himself, no name to the cause of his dread. He binds or endeavours to bind her ladyship to his bedside all day, but insists on dispensing with her services at night. He fears to spoil her beauty, so he says, but in the secret corner of his shrivelled heart, there is another cause. I believe our fears, our presentiments, are oracular ; but, unhappily, like the oracles of old, they speak in a language too ambiguous to comprehend, and their meaning is only made clear, through the consummation of the predicted evil.

Mrs. O'Dowds, the housekeeper, generally sits with his lordship through the weary watches of the night. She does it ungrudgingly, and esteems it an honour, and sometimes oppressed, doubtlessly, by the weight of the honour, she nods and dozes off, but not for long ; aroused by a pinch, a poke in the ribs, a pulling at the strings of her cap, a twitching of the hair, a tweaking of the nose, a whisper, sometimes

of jackals, or the gloom of Indian forests, she fancies it is the shriek of some dread horror that lurks by day amid the dark and secret places of earth, and steals forth by night to drive guilt to desperation. Lord Rathmore seldom speaks during the long vigil; and when he is communicative his confidences are of so strange a nature (begotten by some unnamed terror on a disordered mind), his silence is preferable, even though it oppresses her. At times he is restless, especially when the sea moans like a soul in pain, and the many voices of the plaining winds are heard telling unhallowed secrets to each other, secrets of their dark wanderings and all they have witnessed in their midnight sweep. It may be midnight, but his lordship's room is one blaze of light; a candle glares on every spot above the floor, wherever a candlestick can stand, and brackets have been placed in distant corners expressly for this purpose. His lordship has become more jealous (even than before) of his wife's health and strength, more jealous of the very beauty he takes at times such pains to glorify.

That she can walk about, go abroad, and return with her now usually pale face faintly coloured by the healthful sea-air, independent of him, while he is forced to lie there, exasperates him. That she should have escaped so slightly hurt by the carriage acci-

dent, which still keeps him lying there, he looks upon as a wrong against himself, and considers that fate, fortune, or Providence (he is not particular as to which) has used him harshly. He often thinks, too, of that codicil to his will with regret; yet one clause in it he silently chuckles over, and from its power to crush fair hopes derives consolation. Yet, with all the impish satisfaction this condition affords him, he devoutly wishes he had never signed it.

With all his eccentricities—his littlenesses, his maliciousness—he has a strong sense of honour strangely blended; he looks upon the obnoxious codicil as a pledge given to his nephew which it would be an act of disloyalty to disavow or annul.


He has nursed, or some way or other persuaded himself into the belief he has a grievance against Tom, and, sorry as he appeared at parting with him, he never sends for him now; never mentions his name to any one save Mrs. O'Dowds, and then in terms of such reproach that that respectable woman thinks Tom must have done something very bad indeed. She is too prudent to express this suspicion to his lordship, wishing to close, rather than widen any breach between them. She has sometimes to listen to querulous complaints against her ladyship. Then Mrs. O'Dowds becomes stately and reserved; she does not much like Lady Rathmore, but she is her mistress; Mrs. O'Dowds is a conscientious woman, and will not give ear to my lord abusing my lady without the protest of uncompromising silence; but she is too deferential to contradict any statement his lordship may think proper to make. Sometimes her dogged determination not to

have satisfactorily accomplished that original feat; being unable, he is compelled to content himself with such small missiles of warfare as lay within his reach and power to wield.

Mrs. O'Dowds was wont to bear these onslaughts with admirable patience, and when his small fury had left him exhausted and gasping for breath, she would quietly replace the articles, adapting them to their original uses. Then his old superstition that she had once been a keeper in a madhouse would return upon him, each time with redoubled strength, and he would become penitent and submissive.

Her ladyship is much changed. She is beautiful as ever; but it is the beauty of the Pythoness in repose—not the Venus Anadyomene.

She is more stately, more reserved, more cold and haughty. She might have been Miss Penelope's scholar, so well she seems to have studied self-repression, so white and passionless she appears as she moves with slow and measured step. Truly she has married rank and present wealth. What else? remorse and self-contempt. Her relatives, not one of whom she, socially speaking, ever meets, sing pæans in honour of her "splendid match;" and talk of "my Lady Rathmore," as if her very name was



a seal on the patent of their gentility, and passport to all the royal courts under heaven. If she meets them during her infrequent drives she vouchsafes no recognition beyond a languid drooping of the eyelids which seem too indolent to close.

Her ladyship does not drive often, for she has grown nervous of carriages and horses, and her husband is intolerant of her absence. For this he accuses his affection. It may be he is jealous of everything that administers to a gratification in which he has no share.

Oh! how heavy is the chain that binds, and galls, and chafes her, dragging her down with its cruel weight. There is no means of escaping from it—of breaking it—save one. And the possibility of that one has grown so familiar to her dark thoughts, she dwells on it without a shudder. It is not the dread horror of the act itself, or fear of after-consequences makes her pause; it is that she thinks the last grains of sand are running in the hour-glass so surely, it is useless to hurry them on. But the sands keep running on, and her heart is growing sick and impatient with the “hope deferred.” Her favourite walk is on the beach at twilight, when the clouds are dull and murky, and the voice of the winds is low, yet audible, and the sea moans its eternal anguish like a sentient thing in pain; or burthened with some dark secret of unutterable woe, it longs to whisper to the gloomy shore, yet doubts its sympathy. Or (twilight still) she loves to seek the strand when the tempest is loud and fierce, and the waves lift up their many voices in wild expostulation to the driving storm; and, their cry being unheeded,

Her cold reserve has even frozen the warm fountain of sympathy that wells up in the capacious bosom of Mrs. O'Dowds, which would have freely and tenderly flown out towards her, and, like all true sympathy, no matter how low the source from whence it springs, would have soothed, if not healed her bruised and wounded heart.

Day after day, his lordship (still keeping his bed) lay peering at her under his red nightcap, the point of his nose resting on the silken coverlet, ever meditating some new display of aggravating politeness; still pertinaciously keeping up the fiction of her love for him, knowing, all the while, her indifference has grown to dislike, but never deeming it had swelled to detestation.

Philip is still in Italy, or supposed to be there. He had written frequently to the woman whose love he had won and rejected when in his power to honourably wed her; and now, when irrevocably another's, imagines himself in despair at having lost her. His letters, breathing a sentimental passion (I have seen some of them) he had no right to insinuate to the wife of another, hinted at no immediate wrong—no overt act of treachery against her husband's peace. He spoke in glowing imagery of his despair, but seemed (strangely by the light of contrast) content to await Lord Rathmore's death when Heaven so willed. The thought of what "might be" re-

curred to her, strive to banish it as she would; at length she ceased to struggle against its iteration—not, perhaps, courting the idea, but dwelling on it, almost unconsciously, till it became part of her daily inner life.

That she would ever risk her character, compromise her name, or cast herself as a waif on the troubled waters of existence, in open defiance of the laws of society, she had no fear. If ever her thoughts tended towards crime, it was crime secret, secure, deadly, such as would leave no token of its presence beyond the dread result—no echo of its footfall the finest ear could catch—no trace of its pathway the quickest eye could discover—nothing but the tene-ment from which a soul had fled, affording no record of the murderous hand that set it free.

She would rid herself of trammels that had become insupportable to her, but not by flight or scandal. No matter how she loved, she would not throw around herself a chain of roses, which might fade, wither, and die, leaving only the naked thorns to rankle in her flesh for ever.

The day is dull; the sun, having ineffectually striven to pierce a bank of murky clouds, retires in dudgeon, and will not condescend to strive again. The sea is motionless, and leaden in hue as the clouds which look loweringly upon it—almost touching it—borne downwards by the weight of their own sullenness.

My lady has complained of headache since morning; her maid has bathed her forehead and saturated her hair with delicate essences in vain. Twilight is hastening on, and she feels nothing but the



staring out of his small red eyes.

She is looking very handsome, but very pale. There is a shadow on her brow, and the glitter of her eyes is hard and bright. "I am going out; I have ordered Mrs. O'Dowds to stay with you till my return; I shall not be very long." There is a weariness in her manner, as if the very fact of speaking was a trouble to her. Although asking no question, she pauses as awaiting a reply.

"Will she—can she leave her dear hubby?" he asks, with a comical expression meant for reproach. "Will she leave her beloved, her better three-quarters-and-a-half to the mercy of the O'Dowds, who makes it a point to be fast asleep when he wants her awake, and uncomfortably wide awake when he wants her to sleep?" To this my lady answers never a word. He ever makes it a part of his religion to raise objections to all her wishes. She is prepared for them—will not dispute them, nor yield.

"The evening is chilly; you'll catch a horrid cold," he objected. My lady, nothing moved, says nothing.

He sees she is resolved, and his authority is about to be set at nought. He had been accustomed to see her fall in with all his whims so unhesitatingly, he looks upon her present conduct as flat rebellion. Ah! that cursed codicil! He continued irately, "It's going to rain, you will be drowned, my lady,

drowned. Eh ! what's that ? lightning ! ” (he knows she dreads lightning) “and thunder ” (she is terrified at thunder).

My lady, nothing moved, answers never a word. The evening is gloomy, but not with a threatening storm. His objections have become like scarecrows, custom has robbed them of all efficacy. He is growing more excited.

“There are mad dogs about ; they bite, my lady, they bite ! ” and he snapped with his teeth, biting at the air, and looked as he would rather have enjoyed a similar experiment upon her ladyship.

Still my lady, nothing moved, says nothing.

“Won't she speak ? ” looking at her with an evil leer. “Won't she speak to her loving, delightful hubby, who thinks the light of her eyes was borrowed from the tail of a comet destined to set the world ablaze. Won't she speak ? ”

She allows her eyes to rest on all that is seen of him above the embroidered quilt, and says with cold indifference, “I have nothing to add to what I have already said. Mrs. O'Dowds or your valet can attend you till I return.”

“D—n Mrs. O'Dowds, d—n the valet,” he shrieked, starting up in the bed and mowing at her like an angry ape. “I'll have no O'Dowds, no valets ! no one but you—you, my Cleopatra, my Judith, my Jael, my Helen ! my—my embodied essence of everything that's delicious, refined, double distilled, concentrated, and prepared expressly for me ; bound to me, and tied with a knot death alone can unloose—or the Divorce Court.”

With a graceful motion of the arms, Lady Rath-

sea, his legs keeping possession, while the points of his fleshless fingers touched the floor. Crawling backwards, after the fashion of a crab, he regains, with difficulty, his original position, breathless and exhausted by the effort and his wrath.

She might have now passed out of the room unheeded and pursued her way: a something restrained her, and curiosity to learn the consequences of her opposition, which in his anger he would assuredly betray. She turned her eyes very steadily upon him—how fragile he looks, what a slight hold upon life he seemed to have! He notices her intent regard, and his old fear of her returns. Struggling against the dread that is overmastering him, and gaining a desperate courage from his very terror, he gasps, panting,—

“Hi! hi! we’re growing independent and careless—hi!—too soon—too soon—my beautiful rebel. You calculate on the codicil—hi!—don’t do that; the lips that framed can recall—the hand that signs can rend. What would the paper then be worth? What could establish your ladyship’s independence, eh? Your fancied security would be valued at what? The levelling dust that is blown from the loathsome beggar’s rags into your ladyship’s dainty nostrils.”

She stands beside him motionless. There is no change on the “proud face,” no indication of her having heard or understood him, beyond a slight motion in the curved upper lip. The room is nearly

dark (for it is evening) and she is standing with her back to the windows; yet he sees, or fancies he sees, her eyes gleaming through the deepening shadows. Still fighting against his fear, yet urged on by it, he tells her the same thing over and over again, shrieking it in desperate defiance. She listens calmly, but makes no sign. Among all the sounds under heaven, nay, from heaven itself, was there no voice to bid him stop? The answering murmur from the far off sphere of ocean to the adjacent sea, the sobbing of the melancholy winds, the cry of the sea-bird, fell with an ominous sound upon the old man's ear, mysteriously blended, yet painfully distinct. Burthened, as they were, with a prophecy of unutterable horror, they conveyed no warning to his dulled ear; their muffled cadence, like the rolling of distant drums, thrilled on it with no portentous significance.

Her unmoved calmness goaded him on more and more. Had she shown any signs of fear, or even uneasiness, any indication that betrayed her submission might be won by a little yielding on his part, he would have been satisfied, nay, pleased to escape from a contention began on such slight grounds, and which seemed about to lead to such unlooked-for consequences. But this dogged resolve seemed but a further step in that opposition she had lately raised against his will; as such he resented it, and secretly determined to crush her rebellion by any means in his power. She had yielded unresisting obedience to him so long, partly from policy, and partly from a weary indifference to all the conditions of her life; of late his petty tyranny had

and the end still seemed so far off.

Threats proving ineffectual to move her marble composure, he fell back upon his old plan of affected regard, which was more hateful to her than his violence.

“ You haven’t the heart to desert your hubby ? I want my beautiful, blooming, tricky-wicky wife, and not a horrible old O’Dowds,” he said with a hideous leer.” Don’t leave me; you will soon be a blooming widow; then my Cleopatra will forget her Caesar, and wed—Marc Antony, or Philip Ireton,” jerking himself suddenly towards her.

Not a motion save the faint tremor in the upper lip, a slight expansion of the eye; then in a voice whose firmness betrays no emotion, she asks him, “ is he mad, that he speaks thus ? ” through all her assumed impassibility he saw that he had stung her, and rejoiced.

“ He ! You can marry him *then*—you will have position—*he* thinks you will have wealth—all he seeks. Be careful, my angel, don’t let him trick you a second time; make the bond sure. You see, my Ariadne, I know all—all. Why did Ariadne marry Bacchus ? Hi ! Eh ! Because Theseus *jilted* her.” With this thrust he disappeared under the clothes in a paroxysm of chuckling, but soon reappeared again to mark the effects of his words.

But no effect is visible beyond the faint tremor of

the upper lip, the distension of the eye as before; yet he knows the arrow has struck home to her very heart. Still my lady says never a word.

Thinking, poor fool, he has conquered her, he continues: "To prove the faith of this Adonis—he! so faithless before, I'll send—I will—I'll send for the accursed lawyer—that sly devil that entrapped me—I'll write a new will—leave all to Tom, to honest, foolish Tom. I'll do it by heaven, in the morning; I'll leave no widow of mine a gilded bait wherewith to catch a recreant lover," with sudden savageness.

My lady, looking at him still, still answered never a word. Exasperated to the last degree, he shrieked in a voice like nothing human under the sun.

"Hi! poverty with its cottage, its roses, its woodbine scenting the air, and alive with creeping abominations, foreshadowing in their mean lives all poverty has to endure. Hi! Eh! He'll worship you—this dark Apollo—I know it. I'll leave you a beggar—a beggar, do you hear; I'll do it in the morning. He adores you, I saw it in his eyes; saw it when he saved you from being drowned. I saw it hourly when he sat near you, and you thought me blind. Hi! When I die he may marry you, but he will have you poor as when he scorned your love for the love of gold." Exhausted by his tirade he lay back insensible.

How weak, how helpless, how powerless he looked lying there. A firm hand (even a woman's) pressing on his nostril and mouth, a firm hand (even a woman's) holding him resolutely down,—would *all* not soon be over? What could be said? A long

days. She had endured so long, she would abide her time. Fearing to trust herself, she passed quickly out of the room. As she disappeared, the curtains opposite to where she had been standing were cautiously drawn aside, and Mrs. O'Dowds looked down upon her unconscious master.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### PHILIP'S RETURN.

LADY RATHMORE hurries down stairs as flying from some dread temptation. The consciousness of some one approaching arrests her flight. She looks up, and Philip Ireton stands before her.

She started as if she had seen an apparition, or as if the murderous thoughts, surging through her brain, had with a magician's power, evoked the presence of the Tempter.

"Lucy," he said joyfully, taking her hand in both of his. "Do you know me? Heavens! how cold you are!"

With a quick motion she withdrew her hand from his; motioning him to follow her, uttering no word of welcome, no syllable of greeting, she went out into the bleak air.

Surprised and mortified, he followed her wonderingly. Having crossed the avenue, she glided with a swift and fearless tread down a flight of steep stairs, hewn out of the living rock, which led from the table-land on which the castle was situated to the neighbouring beach. The descent was dangerous, but she trod it unhesitatingly. Philip fol-



evening they had met two years ago, on the shore all golden with the setting sun.

"What brought you here?" she asked, turning on him quickly as he came close to her side, conscious how very unheroic he must have appeared scrambling after her down the giddy stairway.

"What brought me here, Lady Rathmore?" (She made a gesture of impatience as she would have put away the name). "I should have thought that question an unnecessary one for you to ask."

"Why unnecessary for me, Mr. Ireton?" she asked impatiently.

"Because you must have known I would come," he replied apologetically.

"Again I ask, why?" She looked at him as she would read his very soul. She saw the disappointment her reception had caused him, traced it on every line of his countenance, every tone of his voice, and her heart thrilled with this tacitly acknowledged proof of her power. For the moment the present, with all its annoyances, was forgotten. It was but for a moment; a struggle, and her quickened pulses grew calm beneath the force of her imperious will.

"Did I not say I would come?" he returned, half reproachfully, understanding her look and

returning it unflinchingly. "I wrote to you many letters. At first, in your unforgiving pride, you vouchsafed no reply; but still I wrote on, hoping for nothing, seeking for nothing, asking for nothing, beyond some word to tell me I was not quite forgotten. At last, won a little, or, perhaps, softened a little by my entreaties, you wrote to me a cold, formal letter, in which you made no mention of yourself beyond the closing signature. It was sweet to have something you had touched—something that had once been yours."

He paused, as waiting for her to speak, but seeing she made no reply, continued,—

"I wrote again, won by—" (he paused, casting about for some inoffensive term), "by my *interest* in you. You replied less reservedly than before. I wrote yet again. Then, beginning to acknowledge me as your friend, you gave me some faint indication of the burden you had hitherto borne so courageously. I wrote you I would come—you did not forbid me—I am here!"

He spoke calmly, as if stating facts in which she had no peculiar interest. He had a design in this: he knew by the flashing of her dark eyes, the palour of the cheek, the firm set of the lips, when he had seen her in the hall, she was labouring under some great excitement; knew it by the fierceness of the manner in which she had demanded, "What brought him there?" He wished to tranquillize her, to allay any fear his presence might awaken, knowing his professed love for her and her own miserable life.

"I have wronged no one in coming," he said

which even when she was secretly striving against— fighting against—a wrong to her—to her husband—to himself? Was not the very blood surging hotly through heart and brain, as he looked on her great beauty, and thought how lonely and unprotected she was, how cut off from all sympathy but his—a wrong to her—to her husband, and to himself?

“I have no right to control your movements, Mr. Ireton,” (she spoke very low and distinctly,) “and even if I had,—” she corrected herself, “I should say, even if I had need of a friend, I must not seek one in you. You must not accuse me of want of hospitality if I do not ask you to the castle. Its master is pleased to be jealous,” she concluded with a scornful laugh.

“Jealous!” he exclaimed, with fears at his heart, “of whom?”

“Of Mr. Philip Ireton,” with disdainful indifference.

“Of me?” greatly relieved, and pleased by her admission. “What has caused this?”

“Your courtesy, I presume, when here last—your letters.”

“Did you tell him I wrote?” in a disappointed tone.

“I told him nothing; he knows everything.” And the look which accompanied those simple words told Philip that he knew of his past treachery also.

"When did he tell you this?" with forced composure.

"This evening."

"When will you be released from a thralldom which must be insupportable to you? I now see how wrong my act was that forced you to this hateful marriage. I repent the past, teach me how to atone for it." Heavens! how suddenly the twilight darkened into night, that gathered round them like a pall. How drearily the sea chanted its eternal dirge for those that lay in everlasting sleep beneath its murderous waves, and the funebrial winds took up the requiem in plaintive sobbings like the Banshee's wail, foretelling doom.

Lady Rathmore's voice came through the darkness: "Could we atone for the past, could we atone for the present, what say you of the future? And what is my present but a repetition of the hateful past—what but a portent of the hopeless future?"

"Your bondage cannot last for long," whispered Philip with trembling voice. He hardly knew why or what caused the sensation of fear that made his heart forget its natural functions.

"Young and strong men, whose lives are rich in promise, in household affection, in love, die daily; while *he*, worn by age, nearly killed by his own act of madness, unloved, uncared-for, lives on. It cannot be for long—a year at most, and all this wretchedness must cease."

"A year! endure another year!—but you are right; endurance is the woman's fate," she replied with a dreary sigh.

FROM A slit in the clouds fell the pale rays of the half-veiled moon, marking the spot where the speakers stood from the surrounding darkness. No other light was visible save an indistinct gleam from the curtained windows of the chamber where his lordship lay, nursing angry thoughts against his rebellious wife.

“Depend on the capricious bounty of Mr. Philip Ireton!” she said coldly, struggling to keep down her indignant scorn. It was in vain. “Think you so meanly of me, sir,” she flashed forth, “that, however my marriage may have lowered me in my own esteem, I would barter honourable wretchedness for dishonourable peace, if peace could be wrung from such a source; that out of hatred to my husband, were he a million times the wretch he is, I would accept shameful protection from you. That would be a deeper degradation than I have yet endured.” She turned haughtily away. “So,” turning again upon him in her wounded pride, “so this is the kindness, affection, sympathy, love, of Mr. Philip Ireton? The stake may be poor for which you played, sir, but you have lost your game.” She would have gone away but he stood resolutely before her. She had galled—humiliated him, but not conquered. Maugre all her indignation, her wounded pride, the knowledge that she loved him and hated her husband, gave him hope; gave him a

power over her he would wield to the utmost. He had gone too far to retrace his steps and ever hope to stand upon the path again which was to lead him to the consummation of his hopes. A fuller light shone on them through the riven cloud as they stood face to face.

How handsome he looked with the rose-hue of passion flushing his olive face (bronzed darker by Italian suns) and its light burning in his violet eyes. "O the difference between man and man!" the comparison forced itself upon her, and she glanced upward to where burned the dimmed light in the sick man's chamber.

"Lady Rathmore—" he began.

"Call me by some other name," she cried; "the very sound is hateful to me."

He smiled. Truly he would win his game at last.

"Do you remember, Lucy—" she felt she could no longer question the familiarity the name, thus used, implied. Had she not rejected her husband's name?—what protest could she utter now?—"Do you remember, Lucy, what I told you when we parted two years ago on this very shore?" He spoke very tenderly, bending on her eyes the full light of his.

"I remember many things," she replied evasively.

"Have you no forgiveness for the past?" he said plaintively.

"Knowing what you know of the present, how can I forgive?"

"Think you, Lucy, that the suffering has been *all* on your side? that I have suffered nothing? that knowing how by my own folly I had lost you—made

cannot judge—but I tell you this again—by all the host of heaven I swear!—once freed from him, I will make you my wife, my own for ever!”

“Your uncle—” doubtfully.

“Will not object. You have position and wealth—these were his plans for me and not my happiness,” he said resentfully.

Wealth? and the codicil to be revoked in the morning!

“There is no deliverance,” she said darkly; “why dwell on it.”

“I heard in the village Lord Rathmore is still ill; he surely cannot last long.” Those two words were the burthen of all his thoughts.

“No,” she said, with a meaning smile, “he cannot last long.”

“Too long, too long,” he cried passionately; “if it were but a week that keeps you from me. Oh! Lucy, loved so long, yet never worshipped so devotedly till now.” And ere she was aware he clasped her in his arms, and covered her lips, eyes, cheek, and brow with burning kisses. For a moment she yielded to his embrace—one delicious moment—the next she was free: with a sudden effort she had wrested herself from his caress, and with a look and gesture of queenly indignation brought him to his knees suing for pardon.

"Remember I am not free," she said with dignity, yet touched by his repentance. Her heart pleaded for him kneeling there before her, more dangerously than it had pleaded during their interview. She feared him, and feared herself; she would go at once—go, while she had yielded in nothing that could compromise herself or endanger her future.

"You have sworn," she said, after a long silence.

"I have."

"Good-night."

"You will not leave me—"

"I must," she interrupted him. "We may be watched—"

"When can I see you again?"

"To-morrow," with a fateful smile.

"Where?" he asked eagerly.

"In the garden—at night!" He watched her disappear up the difficult steps, till she was "swallowed up and lost" in the enveloping darkness.

How night gathers round her like a funeral robe. Hark! what mournful sound is that? Is it the sea chanting its eternal dirge, or the wind sobbing its requiem for the dead? or is it a universal protest of inanimate nature against a foul and murderous deed?

As he slowly left the shore, an indistinct form emerged from the shadowy rocks; listened for a while; then, groping its way to the abrupt steps, ascended them noiselessly.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE MULLED WINE. LADY MACBETH.

His lordship had been inquiring for her ladyship, and was uneasy at her protracted exposure to the night air.

“Any message to the village?”

“Yes,” his lordship had been excited, and Mrs. O’Dowds had sent for the doctor. He had been here, but was gone, taking a boy with him to fetch the necessary medicines.”

“Had they arrived?”

“Yes, and were in his lordship’s room; but even the housekeeper could not induce him to take any. His lordship was peculiar sometimes, vowed that the doctor wanted to poison him, to please—” The servant, whom my lady was questioning in the hall, stopped in confusion, then added, as a bright idea, “to please the pigs.” And smiled in self-congratulation at having so brilliantly overcome a difficulty.

But her ladyship, from her former knowledge of his lordship’s peculiarities, could very well have supplied the sequel without his aid.

“Any other message—to the village, I mean?” asked her ladyship indifferently.

“Yes, the lawyer had been sent for, had arrived; but the doctor would not allow his lordship to see him till morning.”

So it was to be no mere threat, she was to be left a beggar; or, worse, dependent on the charity of her friends. And Philip—with all her love she felt she could not trust him.

“Mrs. O’Dowds thought his lordship might take the medicine from her ladyship’s hand,” continued the servant.

Such a wild look is in her eye as he says this, he stares at her in surprise; but it passes, and she says hastily,—

“I will not see his lordship to-night, my presence might excite him. If he inquires for me, say I have retired to my room.”

“Has your ladyship any further commands?”

“None; stay,” her lips seem to cling together so that she can hardly syllable a word, “tell Mrs. O’Dowds I—I would speak with her in my room—in half an hour.”

Taking a candle from the servant, she ascends the broad oaken stairs. He watched her as she slowly disappeared, and shook his head with a puzzled air.

“This beats Banaghan, and *he beats*— Well, I never heard her ask so many questions before. See Mrs. O’Dowds in her boudoir! It’s before something.” Congratulating himself on the sagacity of this observation, he went to fulfil his commission.

Lady Rathmore enters her own room, and closes the door after her, locking it noiselessly. In his short-lived infatuation and pride at having won so

being watched by unseen eyes. She next went to her desk, unlocked it ; touching a secret spring, a small panel flew open disclosing a drawer. This was opened by a second concealed spring, which, being pressed, the drawer sprang out. From this she took two small phials, each containing some dark liquid. She examined them carefully, holding them up to the light, as if to satisfy her doubts. At last, tasted them with an expression of disgust. Held to the light there was a perceptible difference in their colour, one nearly black and the other tinged with a dirty green, like water in which herbs had been decocted.

Concealing the latter about her person, she placed the former on the mantelpiece behind an exquisite vase of choice flowers. Noiselessly as she had fastened she unlocked the door. Touching a silver bell her maid appeared.

Lady Rathmore sat down before a large mirror. The lady's-maid, surprised at the unusual dimness of the room, is about to relume the extinguished wax-lights, when she is stopped by a quick gesture of her ladyship. " Let them alone, I can't bear the glare ; my head aches ; bring me my dressing-gown, slippers, and unloose my hair."

She views her fair face and graceful form reflected

in the glass, and even by the dimmed light can see how pale she is. Her maid anxiously inquires if she is not well, her pallor is so great ; but is silenced by an impatient rebuke.

Dismissing her attendant, she rises and sits down before the fire, awaiting Mrs. O'Dowds. Robed in some white material of delicate texture, her dark hair unbound and falling loosely on her shoulders, she sits pondering on her last interview with Philip, evoking it to nerve her for the task she has sternly set herself to accomplish. To hear any voice, and above all voices his, speaking of sympathy, tenderness, affection, in the utter want of all these during her married life, was very sweet. She had been deceived, might she not be so again? Vain argument for a woman that loves ; she accepts no experience as a warning. Through treachery, cruelty, oppression, having once truly loved, she loves on to the end.

Presently a low, deferential knock announced the advent of the worthy housekeeper.

"Come in."

The voice was so altered, so constrained, Mrs. O'Dowds did not recognize it as she obeyed the summons. It was not without some wonder, sprinkled with awe, she stood in my lady's presence. She felt something extraordinary must have happened when her ladyship sent for her to her own room. As she afterwards said (in the words of the servant in the hall), "It was before something."

Since her coming to the castle as its lawful mistress, Lady Rathmore had never once stood in the housekeeper's sanctum, nor vouchsafed any recog-

voluntarily) she had been so overlooked, so set aside, "respect for the Rathmore family, and a profound belief in its superiority to all other families," she affirmed "alone induced her to bear with her ladyship's airs and graces." She respected Lady Rathmore for her pride, as it seemed to her but an exponent of the family dignity. She approved of it in her superiors when properly maintained and directed—"it was only right and becoming, and she hoped she knew her station," which being interpreted, meant she highly esteemed pride in the Rathmore family—when not displayed against herself; then certainly the quality was not so worthy of praise.

Lady Rathmore reclines opposite the fire, with her profile slightly turned from Mrs. O'Dowds. Without looking at her she gave a faint indication it was her wish the latter should be seated. This was a liberty the worthy housekeeper could not possibly think of taking. She had heard an obscure tradition referring to the privilege his Majesty's coachman enjoyed, that of sitting with his hat on in the august presence of Royalty. Though much higher in dignity than any coachman, to sit in the presence of a Rathmore (unless a Rathmore condescended to be ill) was a breach of decorum Mrs. O'Dowds shrank from perpetrating. A second motion from her ladyship,



more absolute than the first, perplexed Mrs. O'Dowds more and more : she was in a dilemma. The fear of disobedience, and the apprehension of presumption, bewildered her, so, to compromise the matter with her conscience, she placed herself on the very extremest edge of a chair, poising herself, and seeming as precariously balanced as a pouter pigeon on the ledge of a spout.

"How is your patient?" my lady inquired, with half-averted face, and still looking in the fire.

"Very restless, your ladyship." Mrs. O'Dowds secretly longs to be discursive, but respect chains her tongue.

"You will sit up with him to-night?" Is it that her very throat, as well as her lips, is parched by fever, induced by her long walk in the night air? Her voice too is changed, its musical cadence harsh and broken.

"It is John's (John is his lordship's valet) turn, my lady; I sat up last night. If your ladyship particularly wishes it—"

Her ladyship does particularly wish it; wish it with such restrained earnestness, the housekeeper thinks she must have some hidden motive for her anxiety—perhaps to conciliate his lordship, and she is to be the mediator between them. Her ladyship is silent, and reclines pondering with firmly compressed lips and thoughtful brow.

The housekeeper, thinking this abstraction is intended as a hint she is no longer required, rises to depart. The movement recalls my lady to herself.

She moves her graceful head, as if about to speak,

to the proud beauty. She feels for her desolation, her unhappiness in her unequal marriage; yes, unequal even though her husband is a Rathmore. Feels for her to-night as she had never felt before.

“No; that is—I was out late, and am chilled;” she speaks with difficulty, seeming to have lost all power over her voice.

“Can I get your ladyship anything?” My lady does not reply. In great anxiety the question is repeated. Yes, my lady would like some mulled claret; if Mrs. O’Dowds would kindly ring the bell and order the butler to bring the wine and other necessaries here. She feels so lonely she would like Mrs. O’Dowds to remain with her a little, before she retired for the night. The housekeeper, overwhelmed with this new condescension, rings the bell, which, being attended to, orders the wine, sugar, spices, and silver saucepan, with such an overpowering accession of dignity the butler retreats utterly confounded, with scarce sufficient power to soliloquize, “It’s before something.” Mrs. O’Dowds makes some deferential remark on the thoughtlessness of her ladyship exposing herself to the night air, and the danger of the cliffs and rocky pools. Her ladyship was “not alone; her cousin, Mr.

Ireton, or, at least, he was a sort of connexion, was with her; they had much to talk about, not having met (her ladyship explains, trying to force her voice to be steady) for more than two years, and owing to his lordship's indisposition to receive visitors she could not ask him to remain at the castle." She had so succeeded in her efforts, she was able to conclude with an air of indifference, as if it all was scarcely worth the trouble of repetition. The butler enters with his fulfilled orders. Her ladyship glances at the silver salver, enchased with gold "Another glass."

The confounded butler, more and more amazed, can only answer with an imbecile stare. Mrs. O'Dowds repeats the order with dignified emphasis. He retires, feeling himself annihilated. Coming into existence again, he tells in the servants' hall, "Her ladyship is going to take a friendly glass with Mrs. O'Dowds. It's before something."

Mrs. O'Dowds pours out the fragrant wine and gauges the spices with a delicate hand.

Placing the saucepan on a chafing-dish, she prepares the beverage, swelling with pardonable pride.

"Are not these beautiful flowers?" said my lady, graciously, rising from her seat. Taking them from the vase in which they had been arranged, she held them close to the delighted housekeeper's face for admiration. There was a faint tingling, as of a bell; one of the glasses had been slightly struck.

"How very awkward. I hope I have not injured it." She took up the glass, (it was Bohemian, of rare beauty,) and examined it carefully. No; it was quite safe. Expressing herself pleased, she placed



right in the eye; but no wonder if the tip of her hand, her breath comes rather short. Ah! it was a pity she had exposed herself to the night air.

The aromatic wine is prepared, and Mrs. O'Dowds pours it into a costly jug, lest the valuable glass be broken by the steaming liquid.

Lady Rathmore takes up the glass she had feared was injured, and holds it towards the Hebe of the hour, not catching it by the stem, but by the bowl, covering it with her jewelled hand, which gleams white as snow against the ruby-tinted chalice.

The wine is hot; Mrs. O'Dowds fears it will burn her ladyship through the glass. No! She hesitatingly fills it. It does burn or scald her ladyship, for her care, marring its own efforts, spills a few drops on the snow-white limb. Mrs. O'Dowds is in despair, and would hastily wipe them off, but is prevented. She holds the glass unflinchingly with a firm and steady grasp till it is filled to the brim, then quietly puts it down; the hand is red and inflamed by the liquid. The housekeeper looks upon this endurance as resulting from a fear of giving her uneasiness, and is overwhelmed with remorseful gratitude. She is requested to fill the other glass. Glancing sympathetically at the discoloured hand, she complies; Lady Rathmore hands her the glass in her possession, and takes the one

last filled. The housekeeper, overpowered by this additional act of condescension, at this stage is ready to fall down and worship her beautiful mistress.

Wishing to be particularly polite and genteel; desiring to appear like one accustomed to good company, she takes the wine in delicate, self-denying sips, raising her head each time like a small bird drinking.

This manner of proceeding seems to annoy her ladyship, as she watches her eagerly from under her concealing hand.

All unconscious of her ladyship's irritation, she sips and sips—then pauses. Surely there must be some mistake. She examines her wine-glass, then the spices furtively, feeling certain some wrong ingredient has been brought her. No, all was right enough. Her ladyship, still regarding her with earnest eyes, evinces an uneasiness in a manner strangely foreign to her usual bearing; and a small red spot, like a stain of blood, burns on either cheek. Hesitating, full of doubts and fears, she inquires if her ladyship approves of her beverage. Her ladyship thinks it perfectly delicious, and confirms her opinion by taking a little more. Mrs. O'Dowds, as in duty bound, endeavours to think it delicious too, doubting the evidence of her own taste, when opposed to that of her ladyship, so empties her glass. There is an indescribable something in the manner of her mistress, which the housekeeper accepts as a hint that to remain longer will be to trespass inconsiderately on her ladyship's condescension, so rises to depart. She is right this time.

see her, and requests her to send the butler.

"You are going direct to his lordship's room?"

"The claret—those spices—I—I am, my lady," returns Mrs. O'Dowds in a confused way, putting her hand to her head.

With a curtsey she goes out, her last glance falling on the spices as she closes the door noiselessly after her.

Lady Rathmore rises hurriedly, rinses the glass the housekeeper used, and throws its contents behind the fire. She tosses back her long hair, and with the gesture of one rejoicing that the first step to a desired end has been successfully won, paces the room with excited gait. The butler takes the salver away with its precious freight. The housekeeper, a sensation of heaviness in her head and unaccountable languor in her limbs, her mind dwelling on the claret and spices, follows the butler to his pantry. She must try the mulled wine again, examine the spices more particularly; she feels her preparation was a failure, although her ladyship was graciously pleased to commend it.

She is too late; the butler has drained to the last drop the contents of the jug, being addicted to mulled wine in general. But Mrs. O'Dowds, drowsy as she feels, is not to be beaten. She tries if there may be sufficient left in either of the ruby-tinted glasses even to taste; she takes up one. Surely

this is not wine at all, but water. More and more mystified, she takes up the other; it is quarter-full, and she knows she left none in hers. Yes, her ladyship was right—it *is* delicious, but so different in flavour from that which she had drunk in her boudoir. She questions the butler. He had emptied the jug, but the glasses had been untouched; there was no possibility of their being changed, as those were the only two of that particular set from under her (the housekeeper's) care. Perplexed, stupified, bewildered, she slowly ascends to his lordship's room, and sinks drowsily on her accustomed comfortable chair by his bedside. No marvel she feels so overcome with sleep—had she not sat up the night before?

His lordship is lying still, quite still; he is not asleep—he seldom sleeps at night; his passion has so worn him out, he has hardly the power or even the inclination to greet his nurse with a reproach. It is midnight; there is silence around—the very winds and waves seem hushed in expectation of some dread event. Half of the candles have expired, guttered into darkness; the others are burning dimly, so dimly they hardly seem to serve for any purpose otherwise than to show how darkness pervades the room. Fatigue has exhausted Mrs. O'Dowds; she is too weary to order them to be replaced, as is her duty.

Hark! there is a wail upon the heavy air—a cry as of a woman in sore distress. In fitful bursts it swells louder and louder, then sinks into a low, sobbing plaint. Lord Rathmore listens in great fear. An old tradition rushes upon his mind, dis-

name. In vain ; she is buried in profound repose. Fear giving him unnatural strength, he shrieks at her to awake and tries to shake her. She is aroused for a moment, and looking at him with an apathetic stare, slowly sinks back to slumber. Making a violent effort he seized the bell-rope; it gave way in his hand—the bell but faintly sounds, and no one seems to have heard it, as no one responds to its summons. The wailing voice is still heard, fainter and fainter, till it seems to die among the stars.

Cowering with terror he hides beneath the coverlet, viciously wishing he had a ring in Mrs. O'Dowds' nose. The silence is intolerable ; he will arouse her at any cost. Peering forth cautiously, he becomes aware of a dreadful presence.

A figure, robed in white, with pallid face and long black hair unbound, falling in heavy masses over its shoulders, a fateful light in its dark gleaming eyes, and a cruel smile on its pitiless lips. He shrinks speechless with horror ; and yet amid all his dire dismay, thoughts of the Lady Macbeth he had seen long ago, force themselves fantastically on his brain. The eyes of the housekeeper slowly open—she is the victim to some terrible nightmare. In a voice so low as to be scarcely audible, yet speaking with a firm resolve, the phantom says "Drink !" and with outstretched hand presents a phial to his lips.

Powerless in will or deed to resist her, scarce knowing what he is doing, he obeys. The next moment the phantom is gone, and with its departure the chain of terror that bound his every faculty is riven. He calls for help. He springs up with a shriek—it is the cry of one in mortal agony—and falls back writhing, his face distorted from all human semblance. Mrs. O'Dowds is awake now, but can obtain no answer to her frequent questions. There is something more than fear or madness here. The hair erect, cold drops of pain upon the brow, the distended eyeballs; the open mouth encircled with greenish foam; the stiffening limbs are tokens that some dread ministry has been at work. The servants aroused from their sleep have indistinct ideas of fire, robbery, murder; and crowding, impeding each other in their alarm, press into the room. They are helpless, powerless to render any assistance. Mrs. O'Dowds sees a handkerchief lying at the bedside: she lifts it, looks at it, and scarcely knowing why, but in obedience to some impulse, hastily conceals it unnoticed about her person.

Lady Rathmore appears in a rich dress caught hurriedly up, and an Indian shawl thrown about her shoulders—her hair, drawn tightly back from her face, is twisted in a simple Grecian knot.

Her presence acts like a talisman upon the distracted servants. Without a word she reduces confusion to order. She reaches the bedside, and carefully examines the bottles of medicine which stand on a table near it. Have any of them been tried? is there none can be of service? She is very calm; but surely this calmness is but feigned

Some one suggests sending for the doctor ; but the last grain of sand in the hour-glass is shaken out, and Lady Rathmore points to her husband—dead. With a shudder she turns away ; her eyes encounter those of the housekeeper, which are fixed on hers with a strange inquiring gaze. It is returned with a glance of wild defiance ; and as they stand confronting each the other, they feel a terrible suspicion has arisen in the mind of each one against the other.

His lordship had been so long ill, no inquest is thought necessary. No one is surprised at his death—was it not daily expected ? And so he passed away, regretted by none save the tender-hearted Mrs. O'Dowds.

In a short lapse of time he became in her mind quite an heroic character ; the Lord Rathmore of her romance, not of her experience.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### AT DHU HALL.

“ A WILD and stormy night ! ” I exclaimed, as I entered the pleasant parlour of Dhu Hall ; and a bright and cheery apartment it was, not too small for convenience, nor too large for comfort ; one of those which have an indescribably “ home ” look and feeling about them, that penetrates even the stranger’s heart with an assurance of welcome.

Family portraits of the loved and lost adorned the walls, keeping a solemn and tender watch and ward from their tarnished frames over the scene of their former joys and sorrows.

*Silhouette* likenesses, miniature paintings of relatives and friends, volumes of poetry, sacred lyrics, English novels, French romances, Lord Byron’s works, Hannah More’s disquisitions, a family Shakespeare, religious tracts, lectures on education, polemic controversies, &c. ; objects of virtu indifferently arranged, home accomplishments in worsted, and beads not arranged at all ; feather-flowers from Brazil ; the latest glories of the autumnal garden ; deep-cushioned sofas and easy chairs absolutely made for ease ; all the (then) modern appliances



and door, opened out into the garden, the valley, over which the rich warm curtains were not yet drawn, commanded an extensive view, embracing a beautiful but negligently kept demesne, studded with grand old trees, peeps of low-lying meadows, and purple glimpses of heather blooming in the not distant morass ; lovely gleams through green arcades of verdure in the summer-time, of the fairy-haunted Lough, with blue ranges of far-off mountains bounding the horizon.

The day had been gusty, and as the evening shadows deepened, the wind had so increased it was now blowing "great guns," as they say at sea.

"A wild and stormy night," I exclaimed, and stood for a moment dazed by the glow of the blazing bog-wood heaped upon the fire.

"Wild indeed, Hardress," said Mrs. O'Storm, late Mrs. Francis Ireton. She was reclining on a sofa near the cheery fire, but placed so as to command a full view of the uncurtained window. Not a little romantic was Mrs. O'Storm, and a true and ardent lover of nature in her every mood. But storm and tempest had peculiar charms for her. Possibly there was a slight affinity between their several natures.

She was below what is commonly called middle-size, and being naturally inclined to *embonpoint*, had very pronouncedly followed her inclinations.

Her dark expressive eyes had lost little of their former brilliancy. Fifty summers had passed over her so lightly and lovingly. . . . Near her sat Mrs. Jessie Ireton, the first love of my boyhood. In all things so different to the first love of my manhood, the last love of my life.

I think in some very remote corner of my heart there was hidden away a chord which, when accidentally touched, still vibrated with a tender music of its own, and, although my affection was very platonic and strictly cousinly, it still awoke pleasant little passages of my boyhood's adoration—when she was absent. When present, she was so changed, or I was so changed, or, mayhap, we both were so changed, I used to smile, thinking of the hallucinations of the past.

A very charming woman was Cousin Jessie in her own way, and very estimable. A first-rate whip, and could clear a fence with the best huntsman of them all. Deeply skilled in the mysteries of the farmyard, strong in liberal housekeeping, very learned in dainty dishes and luscious cordials, admirable in a sick-room, especially when an increase of the population was threatened. Indefatigable in her efforts to keep the little world around her correct in its self-knowledge. Ever ready to assist every one to the disregard of self. Marvellous in her accurate understanding of the business of her poor neighbours, firm in her determination to make them mind it, to the utter neglect of her own. Truly, a very unselfish and estimable individual was my dear cousin, Mrs. Jessie Ireton.

Basil was lying on a low couch, playing with a

ne never wrote now, or, more properly speaking, never completed what he began. His desk was filled with scraps of unfinished poems, scenes from undeveloped dramas, chapters of stories commenced and thrown aside.

The whole ambition of life, its aims, its purposes, seemed to have died out of him, and he was content to dream the time away amid his books, his flowers, his birds, and his music.

Deeply as he had felt Lucy Graham's perfidy, I think Hildred's desertion inflicted the more lasting wound. And what though he had learned to suffer and to bear uncomplainingly, he had not learned "to suffer and be strong," at least, not yet.

Doctor Ireton was seated in his usual attitude of deep thought, his head bowed on his chest, hands in pockets, legs stretched to their fullest extent, with one foot resting on the other, and that other resting on the fender. He looked up now and then as if missing something familiar to him; there is no manuscript on a near table, no learned volume, nothing that spoke of his favourite study. His eyes rested on his wife who was knitting by his side, and although he uttered no word, nor even smiled, there was a softer expression in their light than of yore, and the little woman would noddle and smile, her foolish old heart in a flutter of delight, that her affection was at last beginning to be appreciated.

He had come on a visit of reconciliation rather than forgiveness to his sister-in-law. No, he could not quite forgive one who had married an Ireton descending to an O'Storm.

There was yet another present, seated on a low chair, and ostentatiously nursing his leg in order to display his small foot of which he was very proud, and that other was no less a person than Counsellor O'Grady, ycleped Hector by his godfathers. He had given up practice at the bar, which he never had, and come to reside in the neighbourhood of Dhu Hall, his father having died and left him some property. He is now a resident magistrate; he wishes to be considered emphatically the squire of the neighbourhood, and altogether a very great man.

"Eh! Hardress, eh! Where have you been—out? studying nature in a storm, and all the rest of it," exclaimed the counsellor, extending his soft white hand, soft and velvety as the paw of a cat.

"What induced *you* to come out on such an evening?" I asked, not being very curious about the matter.

"Me?—eh!—Down at Dorian's—capital fellow, Tom—arranging for a hunt next week—hounds at my place on Wednesday—meet us of course, eh!—going to try a new animal just bought—how much? dead secret, fifteen and a half high, straight limbs, broad chest, high shoulders, splendid action, and all the rest of it—eh!—like your opinion—eh?"

"I'll go over; I have not seen a good run this season, but to be sure the fields are barely cleared."

"Our forefathers chased the boar, the wolf, the

“Take the season out of him—expect three hundred for him—eh?” continued the counsellor, ignoring the interruption.

“I should like to see him, too,” broke in Mrs. Jessie, who was no mean judge of a horse. “Would he carry a lady?”

“Eh!—any animal would be only too proud to carry *you*, but unfortunately he has an insuperable objection to a lady’s habit—eh! fact, ’pon honour! Could you mount without one—eh?—happy to let you try him.”

“I have no wish—that is, no very great wish,” laughingly qualifying the statement she was about to make, “but thought it might be pleasant for your sister to have him occasionally. I never knew a gentleman with a sister whose favourite horse had not an ‘insuperable objection’ to a lady’s habit. I wonder if they are taught the former habit to avoid the latter.”

And Mrs. Jessie, feeling she had said something very witty, blushed very much, and laughed at her unexpected brilliancy.

“Eh! too severe, ’pon honour, *too* severe! consequently unjust. Women never do me justice—positively never,” remonstrated Hector, with a smile intended to negative his words.

“Have you had much sport with your rod at the willow copse this season?” Hector was a (theoreti-

cally) great fisher; and a celebrated trout-stream debouched into the lake at this point.

The counsellor gave me a quick, sharp, uneasy look, while a thin sheet of blood spread over his either cheek.

“Haven’t tried it this season,” he said curtly.

Now Mrs. Jessie, with all her kindness, was but a woman; and being so, possessed a woman’s curiosity and love for small scandal, which she gratified on all possible occasions, and which let her into the knowledge of certain little secrets frequently better unknown.

Now it was the aforementioned failings, combined with a feminine love of mischief, prompted her to speak.

“Talking of the willow corpse—”

“Jessie, my dear!” remonstrated Mrs. O’Storm.

“Copse, mamma—well, you know what I mean, so it’s all the same, or nearly so. Talking of the willow—which is it? has any one heard how poor old Paul Connor is? I was told he is seriously ill. His cottage is such a long way off, and the road so bad, I have not yet mustered courage to go and see him. Can you answer my quarries—well you know what I mean—counsellor?”

“Me! eh! never heard—not a doctor, eh?” he said with a slight laugh.

“I thought you saw Connor frequently,” returned Jessie, with ill-assumed innocence. “Indeed, I heard you visited him often, since pretty Ellen went home to take care of him. You know she was housemaid here. She must have rather a hard struggle ‘to make both ends meet.’ But you are famed for charity, in certain quarters; quite an

unprotected, should anything happen to her father. Her brother is a sad scamp."

"The greatest rascal unhung. If I only can catch him—get him into my clutches—I'll have him transported;" and O'Grady's keen eyes gleamed vindictively.

"It is said, even if he were taken, his sister's beauty would save him," remarked Jessie demurely, looking with desperate gravity into the fire, which suddenly blazed up, then the wood falling down with a slight crash, left us almost in total darkness. The counsellor's voice was heard.

"A hundred sisters—nay, gold itself—could not purchase him from my revenge. He's a Ribbonman—a poacher—a—a—everything that's vile; eh! this darkness is horrible." Delicately protecting his white hand with his cambric handkerchief, he stirred the fire; once more the room glowed brightly in the warm, ruddy light.

"When did Tom Dorian return from England?" I asked.

"Return? eh! last week. By-the-bye, he has visitors with him; guess—ten to one you don't."

We could not guess, so gave it up.

"Knew you couldn't, eh! Remember the pretty girl we met one evening at Lady Montague's, eh?"

"We had many pretty girls at Lady Montague's."

“What! forgotten the golden-haired beauty with marvellous eyes? eh! Miss Dalmain.”

I heard Basil breathe short and fast as he gazed with speechless wonder on the speaker.

“I remember her,” said the doctor. “She was fair as Oonagh, for the sake of whose loveliness a kingdom was lost; lovely as St. Cannera, led by the angel.”

“What of Miss Dalmain?” I asked, heedless of the doctor’s learned raptures.

“Eh! she is at present with her father, Sir John, staying on a visit with Tom at Dorian Hall, eh!”

“How did all this come to pass?” said I, immeasurably surprised.

“Pass, eh! simplest thing in the world. Met at the Opera, Lady Montague with Tom in one box; Sir John and daughter in another; Sir John recognizes Lady Montague, and bows; and Lady Montague recognizes Hildred; not quite decided whether to bow or not; angry on Mrs. Fitz-Gerald’s account; badly treated, and all that, but being good-natured and forgiving, when only offended by proxy, bows, eh! Hildred bows; Tom bows, and so on. All become fast friends; Sir John coming to Dublin; Tom invites him here, Hildred of course included; so there they are, and if Sir John plays his cards well (at present he exposes his hand too much) Miss Hildred Dalmain will eventually be—Lady Rathmore.”

“Where is Lady Montague at present?” asked Mrs. O’Storm.

“Dublin; Tom insisted on her coming to Dorian Hall. Eh! Would have refused, only she can



with the existing arrangement. Eh!" he said with that laugh which may mean so much and be the result of so little.

Basil rose, and going to the window, stood gazing out upon the storm.

"Basil, eh! she was speaking of you; claimed you as an old friend."

The person addressed turned and listened in silence.

"Basil's friend! I'm quite a medal of curiosity! Medal? I don't think that's *quite* the word, but it's nearly so," exclaimed Jessie with vivacity—a new subject of speculation and interest was arising to break the monotony of a country life.

"Happened to be talking of the neighbouring families; Dhu Hall mentioned. Eh! Miss Dalmain, she's superb, took me aside; flattered; asked me many questions about you" (to Basil); "not flattered. Told me to say when I saw you—eh! let me see, what *did* she tell me?"

"That's the very thing one wants to hear," exclaimed Jessie impatiently.

"The night you stood together beside the bed of a dying woman; your last ride together in the park. Mysterious, eh?"

The blazing fire, which had been replenished, shone full on Basil's face; I saw the quick flash of joy lighting up in his eyes; the smile beautiful as

moonlight upon his parted lips. In a moment the light was gone, the smile vanished, only to be succeeded by an expression of touching sadness.

"Did she express a wish to—that I should call," he inquired.

"Eh! Well! Not exactly. No go, my boy; Sir John thinks highly of his daughter, estimates her personal attractions alone at ten thousand a year. Eh! Tom is a soft, easy-going, open-hearted, generous sort of fellow, worth ten thousand a year exactly—eh? Sir John feels himself quite at home at Dorian Hall—eh! And what could stand against ten thousand a year; nothing, unless eleven thousand offered."

Here Mrs. Jessie protested with much force and indignation against the libel, and even Mrs. Ireton lifted her knitting needles in remonstrance. I joined with them for loyalty's sake, though I'm not certain but I thought the counsellor right after all.

In our "green" and "salad days" we dream of the simplicity, truth, the purity of love, and the worthiness and sanctity of woman is as a religion. Blessed is the man who in passing through life becomes not a renegade to his earliest manhood's creed.

All further discussion on the Dalmaines, for the time, was ended by a loud knocking at the hall-door and impatient ringing of the bell. Amid many conjectures as to the probable visitor at so late an hour, especially on such a night, and hurried orders from Jessie for the "candles to bring in the butler," the door was opened; a voice of surprised welcome; a reply; a hasty step, and Philip Ireton stood before us.

Our astonishment was great; we all thought he

ASHMORE CASTLE, MORE THAN SOME TWO SUMMERS  
agone. Mrs. Jessie was the first to recover her  
self-possession; she ran to Philip with an exclama-  
tion of delight, threw her arms round his neck and  
covered his cheek with kisses. Mrs. O'Storm, less  
demonstrative, was equally pleased to see her son,  
who, after all, was a comparative stranger to her.  
Philip stooped down and gently touched her cheek  
with his lips.

"My dear boy, how cold you are; where did you  
come from?" He gave a slight shudder, but made  
no direct reply. He was pale, as if suffering from  
some deadly illness, and yet how handsome he  
looked, standing there in his furred cloak, his eyes  
so lustrous in their gleaming light, and his long  
black hair blown loosely about his face. The doctor  
rose and gravely shook hands with him; but there  
must have been something unusually demonstrative  
in his manner, unnoticed by all save his wife, or she  
would not have thrown herself against the wanderer's  
waistcoat embracing his waist—she could reach no  
higher, and wept, saying, "You are come back, dear  
boy, at last; the book will be all right now."

During our several welcomings of the unexpected  
Philip (mine the least warm greeting of any), Basil  
had stood at the window, nor, after the first forward  
step of surprise at seeing him, had he made any  
advance towards him, or spoken.

Philip saw him standing there, and, after a moment's irresolution, went towards him. He seemed about to hold out his hand, but either some appearance in Basil, or some painful consciousness, prevented the act, and he said constrainedly,—

“Good evening, Basil.”

“Good evening, Philip.”

This was the sole greeting between the brothers, showing that the whole sense of injury done by the one, and suffered by the other, was vividly present in the mind of each. Philip, throwing off his cloak, sat down by his mother, a proceeding which made Mrs. Ireton not a little jealous, as she thought his proper place after so long an absence ought to have been beside the doctor.

Each of us (in different degrees) knowing the last cause of the brother's estrangement, felt interested to know the result of their first meeting; each felt relieved when the first words were spoken; each could have wished it otherwise, but appeared to think all was exactly as they had expected; Jessie excepted, she was about to protest against Basil's conduct, when she was happily prevented by an admonitory glance from her mother.

Philip was very silent, nor could all his sister's loquacity win him from his mood.

Where had he come from? “Dublin,” he replied after a slight hesitation. He had just returned from Naples; on his arrival at Dublin, finding his uncle had run down to Dhu Hall, he had followed. There was a something in his manner I had never noticed before, a sort of suspicious irritation (subdued and kept under) at being questioned, which struck me

amazed at a proceeding so much at variance with his usual habits, even Mrs. Ireton suspended her knitting in mild dismay. He would eat nothing—had dined at M——, and now his taciturnity gives place to fitful merriment, varied by great gulfs of silence on his part, but the counsellor and Mrs. Jessie keep the ball going merrily.

At last the former, consulting his watch, declared it is time to go, “and as the storm is lulled—eh!—grown calm,” requested permission to order his horse. This being readily granted, and his request accomplished, he left the room, followed by Basil. Soon after Philip complained of fatigue, and retired to rest.

END OF VOL. I.









